AUGUST 2014
choice.com.au

105 PRODUCTS REVIEWED!

choice

WINE MEDALS
Gold stars or dime a dozen?

LET'S GET PHYSICAL
Home exercise machines that really shape up

TESTS
- Washer/dryers
- Vacuums
- NextG phones
- Pressure cookers
- Tents
- Dehumidifiers

BIG CHILL
Wine fridges to keep your bubbles cool

DISCOUNT DIVA

Live it up for less

Picking our battles

CHOICE has been fighting on your behalf against vested interests for over half a century – and recently enjoyed another hard-fought win

Since CHOICE was founded more than 50 years ago, it has always been part of our mission to campaign for a better deal for consumers, supported by strong laws. In pursuing this mission, we often come up against some pretty powerful forces – governments, industry lobby groups and major corporations that are willing to use every trick in the book.

That makes any hard-fought victory something special to celebrate.

In June, we finally had a big win in a battle that CHOICE and health organisations have been fighting for decades – the campaign for better labelling on the front of packaged food.

Earlier in the year, our hopes seemed to be dashed, when the federal government's Health Star Rating system website was controversially taken down. But, unwilling to give up, we worked hard to show why the new system was so important.

We analysed a number of products – some children's lunchbox favourites in particular – to show how star ratings on the front of packages could confirm big nutritional differences between products that otherwise seemed the same. When Monster Muesli became the first company to put star ratings on its products, we celebrated this and called for other companies to follow.

All this hard work paid off when the nation's food ministers endorsed the Health Star Rating system, meaning you should start to see it on more and more products within months.

Our major priority in the past month has been trying to stop changes to financial advice laws that will make it harder to find independent advice, and easier for advisers to fleece consumers through complicated fee arrangements. Unfortunately, in mid-July the Senate voted to water down consumer protections. But we know the fight isn't over.

The scandal involving the CBA's financial planning business has proven why we all need to care about financial advice laws – because when consumers are not protected from outrageous sales practices, the consequences can be tragic.

Along with our campaigns manager, Erin Turner, I've spent many hours walking the corridors of parliament, trying to convince senators to vote in favour of consumer protection. Our cause was greatly helped by the 11,000+ CHOICE members and supporters who signed our petition. I particularly want to thank CHOICE member Lyndi, who shared her story in our video explaining the changes.

While we lost this battle, we expect the debate to resume when the government presents revised legislation later in the year. If you want to help us convince senators to back the interests of consumers over big business, please become a CHOICE campaign supporter by visiting **choice.com.au/consumer-action**

Alan Kirkland, CEO
Email: alan@choice.com.au
Twitter: @AlanKirkland

For general membership & consumer enquiries, phone 1800 069 552

CHOICE

CHOICE gives you the power to choose the best goods and services, and avoid the worst. We pay full price for the products we test, so remain 100% independent. We don't take advertising or freebies from industry. We're not a government body and our consumer publishing and advocacy is almost entirely funded by subscriptions to our magazines, **choice.com.au** and from other services we supply to benefit members and consumers. CHOICE product ratings are based on lab tests, expert assessments and consumer surveys. CHOICE staff also research a wide range of consumer services. They reveal the truth behind the facts and figures, and investigate the quality and the claims. **SUBSCRIBE** To review the full range of membership benefits available to you, go to **choice.com.au/signup** and compare all our options for providing you access to our premium content across our website, mobile, tablet and print products. **SUBSCRIPTIONS/RENEWALS** Call 1800 069 552 or email us at **ausconsumer@choice.com.au**

PEFC

CONTENTS

4 **Checkout**
News, views and product sneak peeks

14 **Your Say**

16 **Discount diva**
CHOICE staffer Zoya Sheftalovich lives large on less

20 **E-cigarettes**
Is vapour really safer?

21 **Exercise machines**
We work up a sweat trying out some "As seen on TV!" fitness contraptions

24 **Wine medals**
Will those shiny gold stickers help you pick a winner?

27 **Kids' bank accounts**
Little savers cop big fees

30 **Cause-related marketing**
Who really benefits when corporate brands and charities team up?

33 **Life insurance**
Do you have enough cover for your loved ones?

36 **Tabletop gaming**
A modern twist on a classic pastime

40 **Ask the Experts**

75 **Index**

76 **Hard Word**

TESTS

42 **Washer/dryers**
Combo machines that save you space, but what about time and money?

47 **Vacuum buying guide**
Our myriad of tips and pointers will floor you

51 **Vacuum cleaners**
The number one suckers in town

54 **Wine fridges**
Your finest drops deserve the finest storage solutions

59 **NextG phones**
Which models offer the warmest reception?

65 **Pressure cookers**
Fast, but not *that* fast...

68 **Four-person tents**
Big enough for your family?

71 **Dehumidifiers**
A dry subject indeed

Jemma Castle weighs up worthy causes

Are the proceeds of your favourite products really going to charity? Proceed to p.30 to find out

Browned starchy food linked to cancer

"Browned" food – including coffee, fried potato, biscuits, crackers, bread and certain baby foods – contains a chemical that potentially increases the risk of developing cancer, according to a renewed warning from the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA).

Acrylamide, which has been linked to cancer for more than a decade, is found in starchy food that has been fried, baked, roasted or cooked at a temperature over 150°C. According to EFSA, the authority has "confirmed previous evaluations that, based on animal studies, acrylamide in food potentially increases the risk of developing cancer for consumers in all age groups".

Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ), which has been dealing with the issue locally, says it "believes that it is prudent to reduce our exposure to acrylamide in food".

The regulator says it's working towards reducing acrylamide in Australian food. "New farming and processing techniques are being investigated to produce lower levels of acrylamide, for example, lowering cooking temperatures, [and] using enzymes that reduce acrylamide formation.

"We are also encouraging and supporting industry to use enzymes that reduce acrylamide formation and urging industry to adopt an 'acrylamide toolbox' produced by Food and Drink Europe."

How to reduce acrylamide in your diet

- Follow the manufacturer's cooking instructions – many have adjusted their instructions to reduce acrylamide levels in their foods.
- Don't store potatoes at temperatures below 8°C because this can increase the components that prompt acrylamide formation.
- Wash or soak vegetables for several minutes before frying – this can reduce the components that prompt acrylamide formation.
- Toast, roast and fry foods to the lightest colour you can.

ZOYA SHEFTALOVICH

FoFA fails to survive Senate

In a major loss for consumers, the Senate has passed regulations that axe consumer protections provided by Future of Financial Advice laws (FoFA). CHOICE has been campaigning against these changes, which water down the duty of financial advisers to act in clients' best interests, and remove the requirement for advisers to obtain the agreement of clients to keep charging fees. The FoFA reforms were only won after a number of high-profile scandals such as Storm Financial and Opes Prime saw consumers lose $5.7b. More than 11,000 Australians signed CHOICE's petition opposing the Abbott government's changes.

Pesticides unreformed

Legislation removing a scheme that would have introduced the systematic review of agricultural pesticides has passed federal parliament with bipartisan support. The scheme would have led to the review of dozens of pesticides that have never been assessed to ensure they are safe according to current regulatory and scientific standards. CHOICE strongly supported the re-approval and re-registration scheme when it was introduced by the former government. More than 7000 consumers who signed our petition demanded that the Minister for Agriculture, Barnaby Joyce, keep the re-approval and re-registration scheme intact. Supporters also contacted the relevant opposition spokesperson with their concerns. Despite these efforts, the scheme will now be abandoned.

Netflix dominates

Netflix is the second-most popular paid-content media company in Australia, despite the fact that it's technically not available here. According to a study of over 21,000 Australian consumers conducted by Pocketbook, a company that provides "data-backed personal financial advice", Netflix has 27% of the media subscription/rental service market in Australia. And with Netflix looking set to officially enter the Australian market soon, the writing seems to be on the wall for its local competitors.

Health Star Rating food labelling scheme gets the go-ahead

Federal, state and territory government food health ministers have given their final sign-off on the Health Star Rating Scheme.

The voluntary scheme, developed by government, industry, public health and consumer groups, including CHOICE, will help consumers make at-a-glance decisions when shopping for food. The scheme's future looked shaky earlier this year when a website providing critical information for companies wanting to put the ratings on their products was pulled within hours of its launch by Assistant Health Minister Fiona Nash and her chief of staff, a former food industry lobbyist.

We're calling on food manufacturers to start rolling out the ratings to help consumers make healthier choices. "We know that many shoppers are confused and frustrated by the current state of food labelling, in which the complex, numerical information on the back of packs is rendered even more confusing on those products which carry the food industry's voluntary Daily Intake Guide (DIG) percentages," says CHOICE CEO Alan Kirkland.

"Now that ministers have given the final sign-off to the Health Star Rating Scheme, responsibility shifts to food manufacturers to start rolling out the star ratings on their product ranges. There is a great PR opportunity waiting for the early adopters, as we've seen with Monster Health Food Co which rolled out the first star rating in April.

"We call on food companies to ditch the dodgy DIG and embrace the Health Star Rating to help consumers make informed decisions about what they eat."

ANGELA CARTWRIGHT

Hiding home insurance risk

Victoria's Fire Services Levy Monitor, Professor Allan Fels, has released a report calling on the insurance industry to reveal to consumers the risk information it relies on to set premiums. The research was conducted in the wake of complaints about questionable pricing tactics by insurance companies after the Victoria fire services levy was changed from an insurance-based to a property-based system in July 2013.

ANDY KOLLMORGEN

IMAGES: SHUTTERSTOCK

Dodgy electrical retailers busted

NSW Fair Trading is continuing raids on vendors selling electrical goods, with inspections revealing a number of businesses selling unapproved and potentially dangerous electrical items.

These undercover inspections have occurred as a result of the death of a Sydney woman, believed to be related to an electric surge from a dodgy USB charger.

As a result of the raids so far, 138 electrical items – mainly chargers and adapters – have been removed from sale. Inspections in NSW at Dapto and Paddy's Markets at Haymarket also uncovered stall-holders selling unapproved USB phone chargers.

NSW Minister for Fair Trading, Matthew Mason-Cox, is warning retailers and importers not to supply unapproved electrical products and is calling for the media and the public to alert NSW Fair Trading with any information about where unapproved electrical goods are being sold. "Traders must recognise their responsibilities when selling electrical goods and act in accordance with the law designed to protect consumers."

Consumers are also being warned not to buy USB chargers or adapters without safety markings, as they could be dangerous and pose a serious risk of electrocution or fire. A common approval mark is a tick inside a triangle, but you can find more information by heading to the NSW Fair Trading website – **fairtrading.nsw.gov.au**

KATE BROWNE

Older Australians overusing anti-inflammatory pain killers

Older Australians are taking non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) for too long and without sufficient precautions to minimise harmful side effects, according to research conducted by the University of Sydney.

NSAIDs are commonly used to treat pain and inflammation associated with rheumatoid arthritis, osteoarthritis and other musculoskeletal disorders. The most commonly used NSAIDs in Australia are aspirin, ibuprofen (for example, Nurofen and Advil), naproxen (Naprosyn, Naprogesic and Aleve) and diclofenac (Voltaren), which are available over the counter, as well as celecoxib (Celebrex), which is prescription-only.

NSAIDs have been linked with side effects such as ulcers and bleeding in the stomach and other parts of the gut, cardiovascular effects such as elevated blood pressure, stroke and worsening heart failure, fluid retention, kidney problems and rashes.

Australian and international guidelines recommend the short-term use of NSAIDs. However, the study of almost 1700 Australian men aged 70 years and older reports that patients were prescribed these drugs for five years on average.

"Prescribing doctors are not adhering to the specific guidelines for the safe use of NSAIDs in older people," said the paper's lead author, Dr Danijela Gnjidic from the Faculty of Pharmacy at the University of Sydney. "Older people have a higher risk of developing serious complications from taking NSAIDs, so they should be used with caution."

While side effects can be managed or prevented by taking a proton pump inhibitor, the study found only 25% of NSAID users were prescribed one. In addition, it found people were likely to be taking other drugs that could interact with the NSAIDs, with potentially harmful effects.

KARINA BRAY

No means no

The ACCC has set its sights on gyms that advertise bogus "no contract" memberships.

"Gyms should not use attention-grabbing phrases like 'no contracts' if they are misleading or deceptive," deputy chair Dr Michael Schaper said. "If a customer sees an offer of 'no contracts', there should be no conditions on terminating the service or further payments required."

The regulator has put the fitness industry "on notice" for misleading advertising. Several gyms have already had to drop their "no contract" claims, and the ACCC says it will continue to monitor others.

"The ACCC understands that using the phrase 'no contracts' may be an attempt by some gyms to distinguish their short-term membership offerings from gyms which offer long-term memberships. However, using the phrase does not provide consumers with clarity regarding this distinction," Schaper said.

Gym contracts are notoriously problematic, with many gyms requiring customers to commit to costly memberships.

ZOYA SHEFTALOVICH

GE Money found guilty, fined $1.5m

Consumer credit provider GE Money has been ordered to pay a $1.5m penalty for making false or misleading representations to more than 700,000 of its credit card customers.

The Federal Court has found the company, also known as GE Capital Finance Australia, told certain credit card customers between 5 January and 27 May 2012 that in order to activate their credit card or apply for an increased credit limit they also had to consent to receiving invitations to apply for credit limit increases. The representations were made just before government legislation that banned unsolicited invitations for credit limits came into force. The court found GE Capital didn't actually need consumers to opt in to receiving increased credit limit offers.

GE Capital must now advise cardholders what the decision means for them and publish a notice on its website. During the case, the company admitted it broke the law.

ZOYA SHEFTALOVICH

Medicare co-payments to hit Australians over 65

Australians aged over 65 will be hardest hit by the federal government's plan to introduce a $7 Medicare co-payment and increase co-payments for medicines on the PBS, new research from the University of Sydney has found.

The study found a self-funded retired couple over 65 without Commonwealth concessions could expect to pay an average of $244 more a year ($189 for GP visits and $55 for medications), while a couple over the age of 65 with a concession card could expect to pay an average $199 more each year ($140 for GP visits and $59 for medications).

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the reason older Australians will be hit harder is that they need to see the doctor more often. The research found the number of GP consultations a patient had each year significantly increased with age. Children on average visit the GP 4.5 times a year, while those over 65 visit 10.5 times.

Dr Clare Bayram, co-author of the report, said the introduction of co-payments won't be shared equally. "It will particularly affect people who need to use more medical and related services, such as older people and those with chronic health conditions."

The increased co-payments would also cost families. A family with two children aged below 16 and parents aged between 25 and 44 would pay on average an extra $184 more each year. The increased costs as a result of the proposed co-payment scheme would likely deter the most vulnerable people in the community from seeking medical care, Bayram said.

Co-payments for PBS medications will also increase under the government's plan. General patients will pay an additional $5 and concessional patients an extra 80c for medicines listed on the PBS under the proposal. If the proposal is passed by January next year, general patients will be paying a maximum of $42.70 and concession card holders a maximum of $6.90 for medicines listed on the PBS, taking into account inflation estimates.

JEMMA CASTLE

More black marks on consumers' credit reports?

New comprehensive credit reporting rules introduced to Australia may be detrimental to a consumer's credit rating.

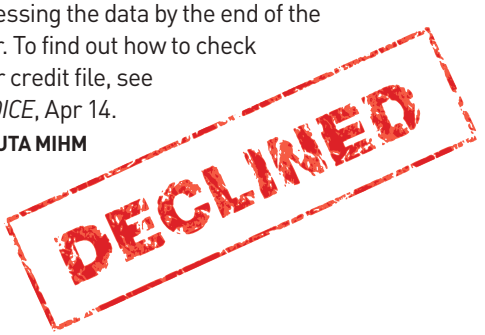
Finance website Infochoice reported that in New Zealand, which has a similar reporting regime, credit reporting agency Dun & Bradstreet (D&B) found a whopping 50% of its consumer credit files accessed by credit providers in May had at least one black mark in their comprehensive credit history.

Comprehensive credit reporting came into effect here on 12 March. Before this, only major infractions were noted on your credit report, such as dodging a bill altogether or paying your phone bill 60 days late. But the new regime keeps track of a range of other information that was previously unrecorded, including the date a credit card or personal loan was opened and closed, the maximum credit limit, and whether you made the minimum payment on time.

The same applies to mortgages, investment home loans, car loans and store finance offered by a licensed credit provider such as your bank or credit union. Whether or not you paid on time will be noted each month and the information retained for two years.

D&B says it has put the first comprehensive data into its Australian system and expects providers to start accessing the data by the end of the year. To find out how to check your credit file, see *CHOICE*, Apr 14.

UTA MIHM



IMAGES: THINKSTOCK & SHUTTERSTOCK

"Victoria Honey" not Victorian or honey

Basfoods has been fined by the ACCC for contravening the Australian Consumer Law (ACL) by selling gussied-up corn and sugar cane syrup under the brand name "Victoria Honey".

Basfoods, a Turkish and Mediterranean wholesale distributor, misrepresented on product labels and on its website that its "Victoria Honey" product was honey produced by honeybees. In fact, the ACCC found it was mainly comprised of sugars from plants including corn and sugar cane. And while consumers could have reasonably assumed it was from Victoria, Australia, it was actually a product of Turkey.

Basfoods has provided an enforceable undertaking to the ACCC admitting its conduct contravened the ACL and paying $30,600 in penalties for three infringement notices. The company has promised to only label its products as honey if they are entirely produced by honey bees, and to regularly test its products. Basfoods will also publish a range of corrective notices.

"It is difficult for consumers to test claims by traders that a certain product is actually 'honey' or is from a certain place of origin," ACCC chairman Rod Sims said. "False claims of this kind not only mislead consumers but can also disadvantage competing honey suppliers, particularly those who source honey locally within Australia."

The faux-honey syrup was supplied at independent supermarkets, specialty retailers, online stores, delis, restaurants and cafes, and via the Basfoods website in 1kg and 4kg containers from around January 2006 to December 2013. **ZOYA SHEFTALOVICH**

Gardasil vaccine blood clot risk refuted

New research out of Denmark has found no association between Gardasil – the vaccine that protects against human papillomavirus (HPV) – and an increased risk of venous thromboembolism (VTE), or blood clots. The findings, published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, alleviate safety concerns that had been raised about the vaccine after two earlier studies reported a potential link.

"Early American studies, which were based on reports coming in from people who were vaccinated, had suggested that there may be an increased chance of blood clots occurring after HPV vaccination," explains Dr Julia Brotherton, epidemiologist and Medical Director of the National HPV Vaccination Program Register.

"This large study, based on five years of vaccination in the Danish population, very elegantly analyses this issue and robustly refutes the presence of any association between HPV vaccination and blood clots," says Brotherton.

Professor Basil Donovan, Head of the Sexual Health Program at The Kirby Institute at the University of NSW, describes the research as "excellent and rigorous. Using a population database of 1.6m women, of whom 0.5m had received the HPV vaccine, [Danish researchers] demonstrated no increase in VTE in women in the 42 days after HPV vaccination. The researchers carefully controlled for other VTE risk factors such as pregnancy, oral contraceptives, age, major surgery, and recent cancer."

RACHEL CLEMONS

Online dating company breaching privacy

Cupid Media breached the Privacy Act by allowing the online dating profiles of 254,000 Australians to be hacked back in 2013, the Australian Privacy Commissioner has found.

The Gold Coast-based online dating company (not connected to US dating site OK Cupid) runs 35 niche dating sites around the world, such as AussieCupid.com.au. An investigation by the commissioner found Cupid Media failed to take reasonable steps to protect users' personal information, which resulted in their full name, date of birth, email addresses and passwords being stolen by hackers in January 2013. It also found that at the time of the incident, Cupid Media didn't have the basic security strategy of password encryption in place, and didn't securely destroy or permanently de-identify personal info that was no longer required.

Following the hack, Cupid Media notified affected individuals and made sure their passwords were reset.

JEMMA CASTLE

Free mobile calls to 1800 numbers

The Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) has announced a new framework under which calls to "free" (1800) numbers will be free from all phones from 1 January 2015.

Currently, mobile phone calls to 1800, 1300 and 13 numbers cost from 22c to $1.78 per minute, despite these phone numbers being free or the cost of a local call from a landline. Under the new framework, developed in consultation with the telco industry, calls from mobile phones to 1800 numbers will be free of charge but mobile operators will continue to charge for 13 and 1300 numbers.

However, telcos will release "13-friendly" mobile plans that charge calls to these numbers against the allowance on the mobile plan, instead of billing them separately. Telcos will also implement an information campaign to let consumers consider whether a 13-friendly plan is appropriate for them when choosing their provider.

The Australian Communications Consumer Action Network (ACCAN) has campaigned for all calls to free phone numbers to be free of charge. "ACCAN has been calling on the industry to provide a solution to this problem since 2010, and we ask that industry honour its own commitment to a January 2015 deadline," said ACCAN's Teresa Corbin. **JODI BIRD**

Protection from collection

The ACCC and ASIC have issued an updated guideline explaining what debt collectors can and can't do when getting in touch with debtors.

"On occasions some creditors and debt collectors go beyond what is reasonable and mislead, harass or act abusively towards debtors. This is unacceptable," ACCC deputy chair Delia Rickard said.

Under the updated guideline, collectors still have plenty of leeway to stay on the case. It recommends that collectors "do not contact a debtor more than three times per week, or 10 times per month at most". Face-to-face contact should be limited to once a month, and "if the debtor provides an alternative and reasonable location for contact and is able to be contacted at that location, the debtor should not be contacted at their home".

And the guidance is less than clear-cut when it comes to contact by email, SMS, telephone or social media, where collectors are merely told that they should avoid "unnecessary" or "unreasonable" contact.

The guideline, initially published in 2005, was revised to take in new consumer protections afforded by the National Consumer Credit Protection Act 2009 and the introduction of the Australian Consumer Law in 2011 along with other new privacy laws and principles. **ANDY KOLLMORGEN**

Energy costs unfairly applied

A new report by the Grattan Institute calls for a rethink of the way consumers are charged for electricity.

Under the current arrangement, customers have to pay the same fixed rate for the poles-and-wires component of their electricity bills regardless of how much strain they put on the network. The institute proposes a change in areas where infrastructure upgrades are under consideration that would see customers pay according to how much pressure they put on the network, rather than light and moderate users being subject to the same rates as heavy peak users.

Such an approach would require reliable smart meters that allow retailers to track which customers are using the most power at peak times, the authors say.

Had such a system been in place in recent years, network owners could have saved $7.8bn of the $17.6bn outlay for the new infrastructure, which correspondingly would've meant lower bills for customers, the report says.

"In the five years to 2013, the average household power bill rose 70% from $970 to $1660 a year," the report says. "[And] some people are paying more than their fair share. These consumers are paying on average about $150 a year more than they should to subsidise other consumers."

ANDY KOLLMORGEN

IMAGES: SHUTTERSTOCK

Dodo warned over failing to send data usage alerts

Internet service provider Dodo has been given a formal warning by the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) for failing to send data usage alerts to its fixed broadband customers.

Dodo failed to send the notifications to broadband customers on more than 5000 occasions between October and November 2013. Under the Telecommunications Consumer Protections (TCP) Code, internet providers are required to send notifications when users reach 50%, 85% and 100% of their data allowance, within 48 hours. The exception is when they have unlimited data or it is "shaped" (meaning slowed down when a user goes over their limit), or capped.

ACMA identified the breach of the TCP Code during an investigation of seven large and medium telcos, assessing their compliance with data usage alerts, a measure introduced in September 2013. Dodo was the only internet provider found to have failed in sending notifications. **JEMMA CASTLE**

HIV at-home self-tests coming to Australia

Australians will now be able to test themselves for HIV in their own homes, with a restriction banning the manufacture and sale of HIV self-tests removed by the federal government.

The changes aim to make testing and treatment for HIV easier and more accessible. Early diagnosis of HIV is critical to ensure the virus isn't spread to others, and to help support and treat those suffering from it.

The government has also committed more funding for HIV therapies. Amendments to the prescribing and dispensing arrangements for Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme-subsidised HIV antiretroviral therapies will come into play 1 July 2015.

The move is part of coordinated national strategies aimed at targeting HIV, viral hepatitis and STIs in the indigenous community. New Hep C treatments are also due to come onto the Australian market, with the TGA recently approving a medicine containing sofosbuvir. It is currently being considered by the Pharmaceutical Benefits Advisory Committee. **ZOYA SHEFTALOVICH**

Healthcare costs a barrier for Aussies

Australia has one of the best healthcare systems in the world, but it's also one of the priciest, according to a new report.

The latest report by the US-based Commonwealth Fund ranks Australian health care fourth for overall performance among the 11 countries compared, with the UK, Switzerland and Sweden taking the top three spots. And when it comes to quality of care, Australia lands an impressive second place, behind the UK. But our ranking slips to ninth on the question of affordability – a trend that's likely to worsen with the proposed introduction of a $7 GP co-payment in July 2015, according to some experts who have commented on the report.

The survey component of the research revealed 25% of doctors in Australia believe their patients "often have difficulty paying for medications or out-of-pocket costs" in 2012, and that in 2013, about a quarter of survey respondents had paid $1000 or more in the past year. The survey also showed that 16% of Australian patients didn't fill a prescription or skipped a recommended medical test because they couldn't afford it.

The report compared healthcare systems in Australia, Canada, France, Germany, the Netherlands, NZ, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, the UK and the US. **ANDY KOLLMORGEN**

CORRECTIONS

In our recent story on kids' lunchbox snacks (*CHOICE*, Jun 14), we said Arnott's Shapes Under the Sea score four stars in the new Health Star Rating system. In fact, they only score three-and-a-half stars, with 9.0g fibre. And the correct rating for Go Natural Berry Frugo's is half a star.

In our slow cookers test in the same issue, the units for the energy use comparison on the bottom right of page 59 should have read kWh not kW.

In *CHOICE*, Jul 14, the labels were missing from the colour key of the home insurance graph (page 41). Purple is Brisbane and orange is Mackay.

IMAGES: THINKSTOCK & SHUTTERSTOCK

Salt intakes excessive for toddlers

More than half of Australian toddlers are eating excessive amounts of salt due to high salt content in everyday foods such as bread, cheese, breakfast cereal, soup, processed meats and yeast spreads, according to new research from Deakin University.

The university found 54% of 18-month-old children had salt intakes higher than the upper level of 2.5g per day recommended for one- to three-year-olds. The study, published in the *Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics*, looked at the diets of around 300 children and found that their daily salt intakes doubled from ¼ teaspoon (1.2g) at nine months of age to ½ teaspoon (2.7g) at 18 months.

Co-author of the report, associate professor Karen Campbell, says a diet high in salt, even at an early age, can increase blood pressure and put children at risk of stroke and cardiovascular disease later in life.

The study also found that the foods responsible for the salt intake in kids under the age of two were the same culprits responsible for contributing to the high salt intake in adults' diets.

CHOICE investigated hidden salt in kids' food last year, and found that out of 240 products aimed at children, 49 foods were high in salt, 140 had moderate levels, and only 48 were low in salt.

"Parents naturally want to do the best by their children, however because salt is added to many of our daily basic foods, they are unintentionally feeding them diets too high in salt," Campbell says.

She argues the findings highlight how important it is to reduce the amount of salt in our everyday foods.

"Most children's salt intakes are high and the lion's share of the salt comes 'hidden' in everyday family foods.

"After reducing smoking, reductions in our salt intake are likely to be the most effective way to reduce heart disease across the population."

JEMMA CASTLE

ACCC takes airlines to court for drip pricing

Jetstar and Virgin will face the Federal Court on charges of engaging in misleading or deceptive conduct and making false or misleading representations relating to allegations of drip pricing made by the ACCC.

The ACCC's allegations relate to the airlines' practice of advertising a headline rate for a flight at the beginning of an online booking process, then disclosing fees and charges (which may be unavoidable for consumers) as a consumer gets further into their purchase – a practice CHOICE has been highlighting for years. This can result in consumers paying a higher price than the one advertised, or spending more than they intended. Under the Australian Consumer Law, you're entitled to see the total price, inclusive of any additional fees, charges or taxes.

The ACCC alleges that Jetstar and Virgin each advertised domestic airfares at certain prices that were only available if payment was made using particular, restrictive methods.

"The ACCC is concerned about advertising that draws consumers into an online purchase process but fails to provide sufficient upfront disclosure of additional fees and charges that are likely to apply," ACCC chairman Rod Sims says.

ZOYA SHEFTALOVICH

L'Oréal can't support anti-ageing claims

L'Oréal USA has settled charges for deceptive claims made by its Lancôme Génifique and L'Oréal Paris Youth Code anti-ageing skincare ranges in the US.

The US consumer protection body, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC), complained that L'Oréal's claims - that anti-ageing benefits were achieved by targeting users' genes - were false and unsubstantiated.

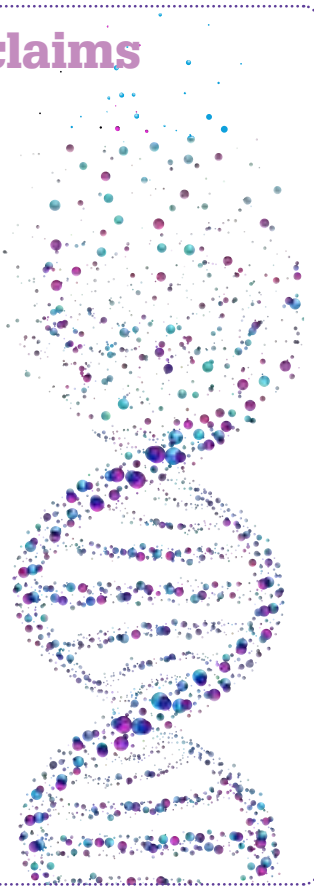
The Génifique products, which were sold in the US for as much as $132 a bottle, claimed they were "clinically proven" to "boost genes' activity and stimulate the production of youth proteins" that would cause "visibly younger skin in just 7 days".

Meanwhile L'Oréal claimed the Youth Code products, which cost up to $25 in the US, were the "new era of skincare: gene science", and that consumers could "crack the code to younger-acting skin".

The science used by L'Oréal for its Youth Code products was based on a study that "did not involve a L'Oréal Paris Youth Code product, or the ingredients in any such product", the FTC said in its complaint. And L'Oréal backed up the claims on its Génifique products with a clinical study of 34 women who applied the product for eight weeks. Unsurprisingly, that study was deeply flawed.

The administrative settlement reached with the FTC prohibits L'Oréal from claiming that any Lancôme or L'Oréal Paris-branded facial skincare products can target or boost gene activity to make skin look or act younger, or respond five times faster to aggressors like stress, fatigue and ageing, unless they have scientific evidence to back this up.

JEMMA CASTLE



Bowel cancer screening rates fall

An increasing number of people are failing to complete a simple, potentially life-saving bowel cancer screening test, according to a new report from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW).

Bowel cancer is the cause of death of thousands of Australians each year. The government sends a free bowel cancer screening test kit by mail to eligible Australians aged 50, 55, 60 and 65. But only one-third of the 964,000 people invited to participate returned a completed bowel cancer screening kit for analysis, according to the *National Bowel Cancer Screening Program Monitoring Report: 2012-13*. These figures are slightly lower than in the previous year.

"The good news is that since the program started in 2006, over 3000 suspected or confirmed cancers have been detected, showing its effectiveness in detecting and preventing bowel cancer," said AIHW spokesperson Justin Harvey.

Figures from the program continue to underscore how crucial screening is in the fight against cancer. Of the participants who returned a valid screening test in 2012-13, 7.5% had a positive screening result.

"One participant in every 32 who underwent a colonoscopy following a positive screening result was diagnosed with a confirmed or suspected cancer, a total of 404 people in 2012-13," Harvey said. Advanced adenomas, which are benign growths that have the potential to become cancerous, were found in a further 728 people.

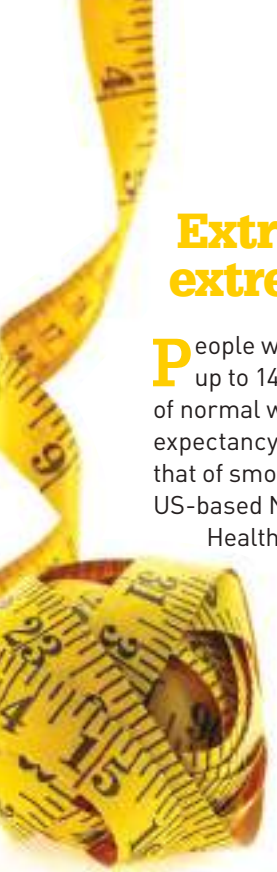
RACHEL CLEMONS

Apple settles antitrust lawsuit

Enmeshed in legal action over ebook price-fixing in the US, tech giant Apple has settled its suit with consumer groups and states. But the company will continue an appeal of a verdict that last year found it guilty of colluding with five publishers to raise the price of ebooks.

The settlement will mean Apple is likely to be liable for less than the US$840m sought by 33 US states suing the company on behalf of their consumers, and other individual consumers who sued in a class action.

ZOYA SHEFTALOVICH



Extreme obesity extremely fatal

People with extreme obesity die up to 14 years earlier than those of normal weight, and have a life expectancy on par with, or below, that of smokers, a study by the US-based National Institutes of Health (NIH) has found.

Extreme obesity, or class III obesity, is defined as having a body mass index (BMI) of 40 or higher. In the US, 6% of adults are now classified as extremely obese; Australia probably isn't far behind, with one study showing that 4.2% of Aussie women were extremely obese in 2008.

The research, led by the National Cancer Institute in the US, assessed the risk of premature death for more than 9500 people who were class III obese and 304,000 people of normal weight included in 20 studies across the US, Australia and Sweden.

Within the class III obesity group, the overall risk of death increased in relation to BMI, with years of life lost ranging from six-and-a-half for participants with a BMI of 40-44.9, to about 14 years for a BMI of 55-59.9. The most common causes of death were heart disease, cancer and diabetes. **ELISABETH BAULCH**

High cost of dental linked to private health insurance premiums

Australians are paying $7.4bn a year for dental care, much of which is spent on private health insurance premiums and out-of-pocket costs, according to the Australian Dental Association (ADA).

Meanwhile, government figures show private health insurers paid out $2bn for dental services out of a total $3.9bn worth of payouts for extras services in 2012-13.

Despite dental care amounting to 51% of insurers' costs for general treatments, Australians on average are only getting back half of what they pay for dental care with private health insurance. But that varies greatly – anywhere from a payout of 60% to as little as 32%.

Dr Karin Alexander from the ADA says dental fees would be reduced if private health insurers were better held to account. While many people blame dentists for the high cost of dental care, "private health insurers should be compelled to ensure that their rebates adequately reduce patients' out-of-pocket costs, rather than allow them to shift the blame to healthcare providers".

When CHOICE looked at dental fees last year, we found it's costly to run a dental practice, with 60-72% of total income going towards costs.

The ADA points out that for the past five years, the increase in average dentists' fees has been below the average increases for private health insurance premiums and the health CPI. **JEMMA CASTLE**

Facebook snooping on your browsing

Facebook recently announced that it's changing the way it manages advertising on the site and its apps, by offering your browsing history to advertisers for targeted advertising.

Facebook claims this is about improving ads so they're more relevant to users and giving people more control over ads. But privacy advocates argue it's a new invasion into people's web browsing habits to exploit for advertising.

At this stage, the change is only for US users, but Facebook expects to expand the system to all users in the next few months.

Facebook sells user data to large online databrokers such as Acxion and Datalogix, which in turn on-sell to other online advertisers and marketers, to amass large stores of information about people's web-browsing habits that are then used to target advertising. **ROS PAGE**

IMAGES: SHUTTERSTOCK

Your Say

We want to hear from you. If you've had a bad experience, been ripped off or scammed, tell us and help other CHOICE members avoid the same traps. If you've had a great response to a complaint you've taken to a manufacturer or retailer, our members want to know about that too! Letters may be edited for length and clarity, and we regret that we cannot reply to all correspondence.

Contact us!

Email us at **yoursay@choice.com.au** or write to Your Say, CHOICE, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville, NSW 2204.

Wave of doubt

My Visa card is equipped with PayWave and I use it all the time. So you can imagine my surprise when I went to the coffee shop inside a local university and was told the cafe charges 50c for PayWave. This seems to fly in the face of PayWave paving the way for not carrying cash for small transactions. Can you advise if there are any consumer protections in PayWave agreements, or should we expect this to be a growing problem with small retailers?

Tony Bailey, Adelaide, SA

CHOICE SAYS *We know that many merchants add extra fees to card transactions on the pretext of recovering a cost. It can be tough to figure out when a business is legitimately covering the cost of taking a payment or when it's getting extra revenue through the fees.*

Currently, no regulator is responsible for overseeing surcharging or card transaction costs. CHOICE is lobbying for all surcharge payments to be limited to the genuine cost of the transaction and for a regulator to enforce this rule. For now, we recommend that consumers express their displeasure, ask for an explanation, and take their business elsewhere if necessary.

Fully charged

My 91-year-old friend bought a new fluorescent tube for her kitchen from her local electrical store for $9.75. She asked if someone could replace the old one with this new one, and a house call was arranged for the next day – a service for which she expected there to be a charge. The work took less than five minutes, yet she was charged $89.75, $80 of which was for the house call.

My friend, a pensioner who lives about a kilometre from the store and has been a customer there for many years, suggested $80 was excessive. She was told she should have queried the cost of a house call at the time of her request. Furthermore, if the account was not paid within seven days, interest would be charged. Already distressed, she paid.

I contacted Consumer Affairs and Fair Trading on her behalf. Although they were very understanding, they advised me that there was no legal obligation for companies to inform a customer of service charges. They said it is the customer's responsibility to ask, and expressed their concern that there is no legislation to cover customer service. Similar situations are apparently not uncommon.

I suggest an article reminding customers of the importance of asking about service charges in the initial stages of any business transaction.

June Dallas, Hobart, Tas

Thumbs

Four years ago I purchased a weather station from Jaycar in Frankston, and it has provided good service. One of the three cups on the wind speed sensor recently disappeared – it may have been hit by debris in a storm. I emailed Jaycar to see if it was possible to purchase a spare wind speed sensor rather than replace the whole unit. Four days later a new sensor arrived in the mail, no charge. I hadn't expected this and was quite impressed.

Sjoerd Bakker, Lima East, Vic

I bought a new microwave oven from Kambo's. My adult daughter accidentally broke the glass dish when it stuck to a bowl of food she was removing from the microwave. She found the glass dish was available online for about $50, which I thought was expensive given the whole microwave was only about $120. When I messaged Kambo's on their Facebook page, the manager called back saying he had a spare glass dish in the store. I went in that day to collect it, and the manager told me there'd be no charge even though it wasn't under warranty since my daughter had broken it.

Helen Petkov, Perth, WA

I recently purchased a Bigpond/Foxtel TV content

IMAGES: SHUTTERSTOCK

I found it was so hot, it would quickly burn my food. It wasn't a slow cooker at all!

Heat is on slow cookers

LETTER OF THE MONTH

I recently purchased a Sunbeam SecretChef Electronic Sear and Slow Cooker. I found it was so hot, it would quickly burn my food. It wasn't a slow cooker at all!

Thinking it was faulty, I exchanged it for another one to find the same problem. I decided to test its performance by adding three litres of cold water. On low, it reached 100°C in two hours, starting with water at 10°C!

My testing has found that the automatic keep-warm setting on the Sunbeam runs at a regular 68°C. Since I read that 65°C is a good slow cooker temperature, I've wondered if food would be safe to cook on that setting, though there is little control over it and it switches off after four hours.

I phoned Sunbeam, who refused to tell me their temperatures for each setting. They suggested the way to use it is to sear the meat, let it go stone cold, put vegetables on the bottom and meat on top followed by liquid. While this is inconvenient, I did so and found the whole casserole was boiling in two hours on the low setting, as my water test indicated, and the meat was cooked in two hours as well.

Having used slow cookers for years, I find all this very disappointing and I'm wondering where to go from here. I'd love to see more information about the cooking temperatures of each slow cooker and their performance. How can the manufacturers describe these so-called convenient cookers slow, when they clearly are not?

Heather Robb, Thornton, Vic

CHOICE SAYS *This sounds like a faulty sample (or faulty batch, since the replacement performed similarly). We didn't find this problem with the Sunbeam when we tested it. The "keep warm" setting should not be used for cooking. We recommend you contact Sunbeam in writing and explain the problems you've found, and return the slow cooker for a refund. Perhaps try one of the other models we've recommended (see* CHOICE, *Jun 14).* ■

bundle, only to experience several problems with billing and with connecting to the Foxtel Go facility. After spending many hours over several days to solve these matters via Telstra's telephone support without success, I resorted to Telstra's online CrowdSupport forum for assistance. The service issues were elevated to the appropriate staff for immediate correction, and my billing concerns were resolved to my absolute satisfaction. Telstra employees remain anonymous in online forums, but I'd still like to praise the CrowdSupport team member as a stellar credit to Telstra.

Ross Ellicott, Eleebana, NSW

Discount diva

CHOICE journalist **Zoya Sheftalovich** spends seven days hunting down bargains and saving hundreds

I often dream of massages, new outfits, gourmet dinners, good wine and a do from a "designer hair boutique" (hairdressers and salons are so passé these days). Problem: I've got champagne tastes but only a cheap sparkling wine budget.

So how do I stretch my dollars further? Is it possible to live like royalty on a (not-quite) pauper's salary? Enter my seven-day bargain-hunting challenge. CHOICE sent me off on a coupon-, sale-, special- and freebie-splurging odyssey. My goal: live it up big, but spend little.

No bill shock for me

CHOICE has long argued that the "lazy tax" (see *CHOICE*, Mar 13) is costing Australians buckets of cash. Generally I'm pretty good at minimising regular expenses; I long ago rolled all my superannuation into one account, I don't auto-renew my car insurance (I saved around $116 this year by taking out a new policy instead), and last year, after my Telstra $49 plan expired, I went on a plan that costs me just $11 a month, saving almost $500 per year.

Yet even savvy CHOICE journalists such as yours truly can sometimes fall into the habit of going with the flow. And when that flow comes in the form of dollars flowing all the way out of my pocket and into someone else's, it's time to take stock.

Saving money on energy bills

Truth be told, I haven't compared electricity and gas prices for years. I've been with the same company since I last moved, yet for a long time I felt the price I was paying was far from the best deal on offer. Sure enough, when I hunted around for a better deal, I was surprised to find I could save quite a bit.

Top tips for saving on electricity and gas

If you want to make your money stretch further, it's worth getting out there and negotiating.

- **Check you're getting the best rate**. You can easily compare energy plans by heading to energymadeeasy.gov.au, an Australian government website that allows you to check the offerings of all the gas and electricity retailers in your area.
- **Ask your retailer for any discounts they can offer you**, such as a discount for paying on time or signing up to a contract.

Saving money on my credit card

While I've long since ditched bank accounts with account-keeping fees (a no-brainer, considering there are loads of low-fee or free bank accounts out there), my credit card has an annual fee that I've (begrudgingly) paid for the past decade. Despite the fact that there are free credit cards out there (I have one of those too), I've held on to my paid card because of its included travel insurance.

But since I'm travelling less nowadays, I figured it was time to lose it before my annual fee ticked over again. I rang up the bank and explained why I wanted to cancel, and lo and behold, they were willing to refund my $89 annual fee. Five minutes on the phone well spent!

Top tips for saving on banking

- Look for a **free credit card with low interest rates**.
- **CHOICE has found credit card reward point schemes generally aren't worth it**. You're probably better off saving money than racking up points that go nowhere.
- Look out for a **free bank account**.

Supermarket savings

The weekly shop can get out of hand and really blow the budget if you're not careful. This week, I'm shopping like a ninja – hunting down every bargain, karate-chopping brand loyalty and visiting both Coles and Woolworths to make sure I track down groceries at the cheapest price.

This week's shop is a big one – I have some friends coming over on the weekend and I'm out of quite a few staples. But with washing powder, dishwashing liquid, toothpaste and packaged goods on an everlasting sale rotation, there's no need to pay full price for many items. I may have spent a little more time at the shops (not so long that I needed to pay for parking, though), but I end up saving around 30% off full price.

If only supermarket bargain hunting were an Olympic event. I like to think I'd have a chance at a podium finish.

Top tips for saving at the supermarket

- If you don't have a Woolworths Everyday Rewards card but want to buy something that's on special for members only, **ask the cashier if they can scan in one of their spare cards at the register**.
- **Some items are regularly on sale and can last for ages in your cupboard or pantry**, including laundry detergent, pasta and packaged foods. Start looking out for specials on these items a few weeks before you're due to run out.
- **Always check the unit price**. Just because something is on sale or in a bulk package, doesn't always mean it's the cheapest option.
- **Don't be tricked into buying more items just to get the lower price**. When you see a multi-buy offer, for example three bags of pasta for $3, that just means you have to buy a minimum of three bags to qualify for the unit price of $1. So if you only need four bags of pasta, buy four, not six.
- **If an item scans in at a higher price than it should, you can get it free** so long as the supermarket has signed up to the scanning code of practice (see *CHOICE*, Jul 14, page 37).

Entertainment on a budget

Entertainment eats up a significant chunk of my monthly budget. From catching a flick at the movies to dinner and a show, I'm a big fan of getting out and about. But entertainment isn't cheap.

Thankfully, there are some easy savings to be made. I'm a frequent borrower of books, e-books and movies from my local library. But what about something a little more frivolous? This week, I've been expressly told to seek out the very best. But I'm not going to pay full price!

Getting cheap movie tickets

First stop: the flicks. Now I know what you're thinking – who's going to pay $20 for a movie ticket when you can legally stream it for a fraction of the cost? The thing is, I enjoy the experience of sitting in a cinema, surrounded by popcorn munchers and chip crunchers, shushing the teenagers giggling behind me and exchanging knowing glances with my fellow grown-ups. It's the vibe.

The last time I paid full price for a cinema ticket was... never. I source discounts from various places, including the Entertainment Book, member discounts with a health insurer and special offers available to members of various cinema movie clubs. This week, I pay $11 instead of $19.50 – my friend has a Telstra mobile, and their partnership with Event Cinemas entitles this discount diva to a saving of almost 50%.

Last-minute theatre tickets

So you're after something a little more high-brow than the latest Hollywood blockbuster? Well this week, so am I. And if, like I am, you're prepared to wait till the last minute, you too could be attending *Mojo* at the Sydney Theatre Company on a two-for-one deal.

The last time I paid full price for a cinema ticket was... never

The secret is Lasttix. I've subscribed to many a weekly deal newsletter in my day, but hands down my favourite email ▸

comes from these folks. They purvey unsold tickets to all sorts of things at the last minute, sometimes at 50% off.

Buying discounted clothes

Now that I'm going out, I need a new dress to wear. I could drive all the way to the nearest department store and spend time and money parking and trying on dress after dress (chances are I could get a good deal there, with all the sales around). But I choose to go online instead and check out what's on offer on Asos and The Iconic.

Asos is a bargain-hunter's dream. You just sign up to their mailing list, then wait (usually not long at all) for a discount code to arrive in your email. This must be the only week Asos doesn't send me a coupon code, but The Iconic is having a free three-hour shipping promotion. I find a heavily reduced dress (around $50 instead of $130), and it's at my door just two hours later.

Theatre tickets $101.50

Saved $94

Dress $49.95

Saved $80

Dining out on a budget

Since I've got a new outfit, I wouldn't mind pairing it with a gourmet meal, complete with lobster, the king of crustaceans. "Come on now," I hear you say, "you can't get good lobster on the cheap." And up until a week ago, I would have agreed with you. Turns out I was wrong. With nary a mornay in sight, I indulge in 11 courses of Japanese delights (including lobster tail) at The Rocks Teppanyaki. Full price: $160. I pay $69.

This black magic is courtesy of group-buying site Groupon. But there is a downside to this: it may be another few years before I get lobster again, and now I know what I've been missing out on. Perhaps I should've gone to the local RSL instead.

Buying cheap wine online

Wine. It's delicious – and apparently the red stuff can even be good for you in moderation. But unless you plan on drinking from a box, you could be forgiven for thinking you won't get much change out of a $20 note.

Enter online wine merchants, including Vinomofo, GraysOnline and Wine Market. It turns out you can get quite the bargain, especially if you're willing to buy in bulk and take a punt on a mystery case. I try my luck and it's a good thing I do: $90 for a secret deal on a case of "Black Market" Gewürztraminer on Vinomofo, which I discover is a delightful vintage from one of my favourite wineries.

Savings to entertain

- Before buying anything from an online clothing store, **check their social media pages** or search online for any coupon codes – they'll often knock an extra 10-30% off their prices for fans.
- **Create a new email address for special offers** and sign up to a bunch of mailing lists and loyalty programs. You can then check the email when you're looking for a cheap night out without having your regular inbox clogged up with temptation.
- **Check reviews for a restaurant, play or concert before buying a voucher.** There may be a reason they're resorting to a group-buying site or last-minute ticket reseller, and you don't want to waste your money just for the sake of it.

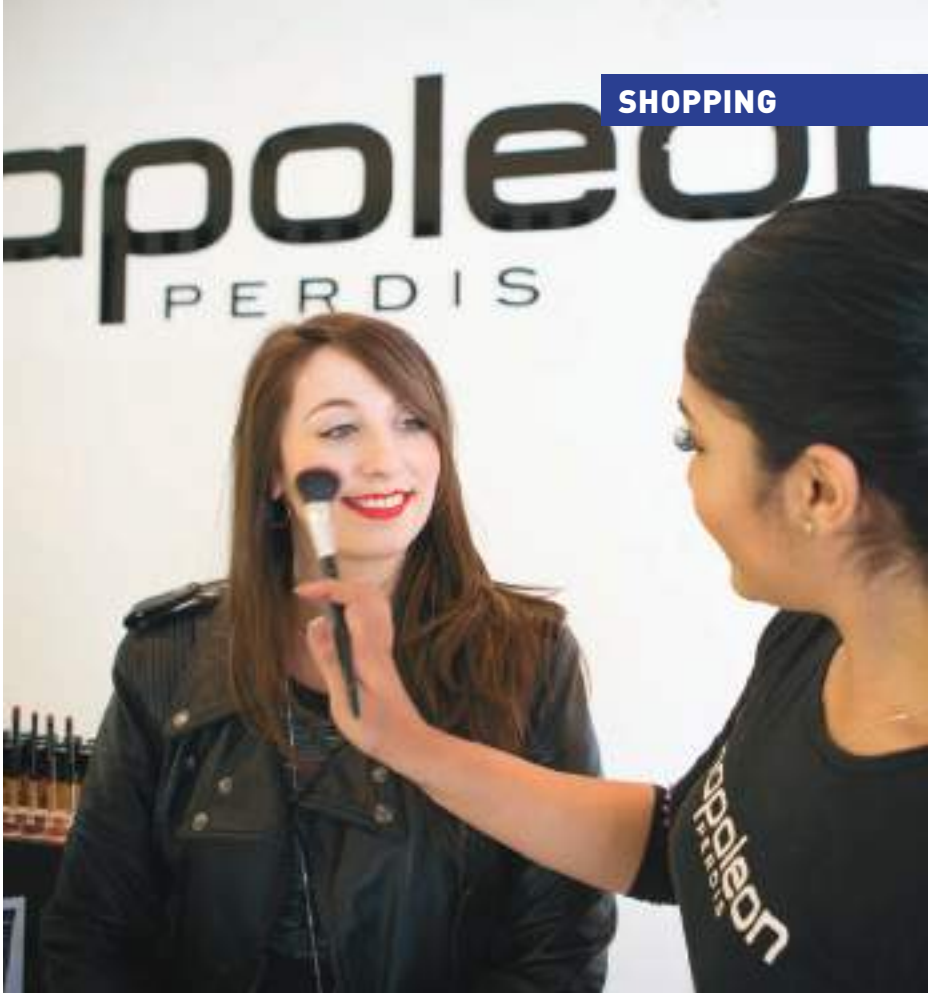
The beauty of saving

A haircut, colour and blow dry at an exclusive salon can set you back hundreds. So it is with a great degree of excitement (though not without trepidation) that I look into hair modelling. At first I'm sceptical – I'm no Heidi Klum – but a fellow CHOICE staffer (with great hair) tells me about the world of free haircuts offered on Gumtree by apprentices. The idea of putting my head into the hands of students seems a little daunting, but I'll do anything for a good story.

In the end, I don't end up at a beauty school. I stumble across Element Hair, an exclusive Sydney salon offering a free cut, colour, foils, and blow dry by a senior stylist. The catch? The hairdresser is a potential new hire, so I'm part guinea pig,

Haircut, colour, blow dry $0

Saved $310



part adjudicator. Two hours later, I emerge with designer tresses. Not too shabby, considering it was free.

You can also score bargains on facials, waxing, manicures and massages at beauty colleges. I'm not game enough to put my sensitive skin on the line, but I do get a $30 one-hour remedial massage at one such clinic in Sydney.

When it comes to professional beauty, a make-up artist can charge a hundred bucks for the full treatment. But head to your nearest department or beauty store and you may just find they're happy to demonstrate their products for free. I visit a Napoleon Perdis boutique and walk out with a complete makeover, and my wallet none the lighter.

And speaking of beauty, I realise I'm about to run out of mascara halfway through the week. Luckily, I head to my go-to online beauty store, Strawberry.net, and snatch up a Clinique High Impact tube for just over $26 – a pretty good deal, as they retail in Australia for $38. ■

What Zoya bought & saved

ITEM	AMOUNT PAID	FULL PRICE	Saving
GROCERIES	$221.95	$320.22	$98.27
HAIRCUT, COLOUR, BLOW DRY	0	$310	$310
CREDIT CARD ANNUAL FEE	0	$89	$89
MASSAGE	$30	$90	$60
MOVIE TICKETS	$11	$19.50	$8.50
WINE	$99	$300	$201
DINNER AT THE ROCKS TEPPANYAKI	$69	$160	$91
MOJO AT THE SYDNEY THEATRE COMPANY	$101.50	$195.50	$94
DRESS	$49.95	$129.95	$80
MAKEOVER	0	$100	$100
MASCARA	$26.12	$38	$11.88
TOTAL	$608.52	$1752.17	**$1143.65**

Smoke & mirrors

Are e-cigarettes a healthy alternative to regular cigarettes? **Karina Bray** finds out

Have you recently noticed someone taking a drag on a fancy cigarette, but blowing out vapour instead of smoke?

Electronic cigarettes, also known as e-cigarettes, are battery-powered devices with liquid-filled cartridges that, when heated, create an inhalable mist. The liquid is flavoured to taste like tobacco or menthol or other more exotic flavours – for example, fruits, mint or chocolate – and may or may not contain nicotine.

Supporters argue that replacing regular cigarettes with e-cigarettes is a better way for people to get their nicotine. Where smoke from combustible cigarettes contains 4000 different chemicals, including more than 60 carcinogens, proponents claim e-cigarettes contain fewer toxins. Further, the second-hand vapour is negligible and likely safer than second-hand smoke (which affects smokers and non-smokers alike).

Detractors, however, argue they do more harm than good. After decades of working to stigmatise smoking – with a high degree of success – health authorities are concerned these cigarette-like devices will once again make smoking "cool". There's also concern that they're enticing children to start smoking, especially with kid-friendly flavours such as strawberry and bubblegum on offer.

Their safety is questionable. Nicotine is a highly toxic chemical, and overseas studies have found the amount of it delivered in e-cigarettes may be more or less than the amount stated. Leakage is also a risk – nicotine absorbed through the skin can make people very sick and even kill them. While nicotine replacement therapy (NRT) products such as gum and patches have been rigorously assessed for efficacy and safety, no assessment of e-cigarettes – regardless of whether or not they contain nicotine – has been undertaken.

Health authorities are worried these cigarette-like devices will once again make smoking "cool"

As to whether they help people quit smoking, some studies have found they're more, or as, effective as conventional NRT products, while others have not. Other studies have found that people who haven't quit have at least replaced cigarettes either entirely or partially with e-cigarettes, with perceived health improvements.

Adam Royle, sales manager at Electronic Cigarettes Australia, points out that many quitters use e-cigarettes without nicotine as a "placebo", giving them a tool for the hand-to-mouth smoking action.

Can they be sold here?

Nicotine cannot be sold or supplied in Australia except in cigarettes and other tobacco and registered NRT products. As such, retailers can't legally sell nicotine for e-cigarettes in local stores. So how have Australians got their hands on it?

Nicotine is often bought online from overseas in small ("personal use") quantities, and isn't prohibited under Australian Customs law. However, some state laws override this, with Queensland and Victoria among those currently banning possession of nicotine liquid. Some states also ban the sale of products that look like cigarettes, including food and toys, and a recent case in WA upheld this law in relation to e-cigarettes.

What's the story overseas?

The US Food and Drug Administration is planning to regulate e-cigarettes, requiring registration of products and warning labels stating they contain the addictive substance nicotine, and banning sales to under-18s. Similar regulations will take effect in the EU from 2016, including an advertising ban and a stipulation that products be childproof.

CHOICE verdict

While smoking e-cigarettes appears to be safer than regular cigarettes, at least in the short term, there is not enough long-term research on their effects. For current non-smokers especially, it's best to avoid them until more is known about their safety. If you're trying to kick the cigarette habit, stick with conventional NRT products or another approved method, such as counselling. Call Quitline on 13 78 48 for more info, or visit quitnow.gov.au ■

Working from home

Are home exercise machines, as seen (often) on infomercials, worth your time and money? **Karina Bray** works it out

Ever wondered whether those TV infomercial exercise machines are as effective and as much fun as the actors make out? CHOICE decided to put in the hard yards to find out. With the help of fitness trainer Jesse Hogan, Pilates instructor Leesa Thornthwaite (see below) and some keen CHOICE staffers, we put six of the of the more popular "As seen on TV!" exercise machines to the test.

X-step

COST $199.95
+ 19.95 P&H
FROM GLOBAL SHOP

What is it? A bulky set of plastic pneumatic steps with a counter and attached resistance bands. It comes with seven DVD workouts designed to give a low-impact cardio workout and also target different muscle groups "so you can sculpt your body from head to toe".

Jesse says *There's not a great range of movement, and for fitter people on its hardest setting it doesn't really get the heart working. It does challenge balance and stability, which is a good thing – as long as you don't come off it!*

User review Triallists felt it didn't seem to do much, and that it would be boring unless you follow the DVD workouts (which may also become boring after a while). No-one could get the counter to work.

Verdict You could achieve more with a set of stairs and some resistance bands, some workout DVDs, or just going for a run.

Jesse Hogan is a fitness trainer with Agoga Gym in Bondi, NSW. He has a Bachelor of Physical Education and Fitness. qualifications.

Leesa Thornthwaite is a fitness trainer and qualified Pilates and yoga teacher. She owns Pure Yoga in Peakhurst Heights, NSW.

Pilates Power Gym

COST $399.95 + 49.95 P&H FROM DANOZ DIRECT

What is it? Modelled on a Pilates reformer like those you find in a studio, this is a compact, padded gliding board on rails with bungee cords and adjustable incline to provide various degrees of resistance. It claims to combine 18 weight machines to address the fitness needs of both men and women. The manual and DVD provide instructions for traditional strength-building exercises and Pilates moves.

Leesa says *It's a little too small and unstable, and the positioning of the cable posts right alongside the head is awkward and a bit claustrophobic. For some exercises the cables tend to jam because of the angle, and after only a few minutes' use there was evidence of damage to the cover of the bungee cords.*

Jesse says *The range of movement is restricted by the length of the board and angle of the cables. A lot of the metal-looking bits are in fact plastic, and may not be very robust.*

User review Our triallists were quite positive about this machine and liked the concept and variety of exercises. Overall, given the price, they thought it would be good value. However, it was too small for our taller users, the small space for the head concerned people, and some thought it would get boring after a while.

Verdict Leesa and Jesse agreed this could be good for a smaller person, though both had some concerns about its robustness. You can do similar exercises and more on the Total Gym XLS (opposite), which would also represent better value provided you can bargain down the price (and have the space for it).

Ab Coaster Flex

COST $200 + $19.95 P&H FROM GLOBAL SHOP

What is it? A padded seat that glides along curved rails, the idea is that by kneeling on the seat you contract your abs to lift your knees, similar to a hanging leg raise in the gym. The seat can be angled to work your obliques, and you can also add weights as you get stronger. The accompanying workout video consists mostly of aerobics-style moves and includes a few minutes of Ab Coaster work.

Jesse says *You might start with a good technique when using this machine, but that may deteriorate with fatigue – it's easy to use the momentum to keep swinging, rather than using your ab muscles to lift your legs. There's a lot of tension in the upper body, and the posture takes your spine out of a neutral position – so there's potential for lower back pain.*

User review It's quite fun and you can definitely feel it working the target muscles if done properly. But the range of exercises is limited, it's noisy, the counter is difficult to see while in action, and it doesn't seem to offer much more than ab exercises that don't need equipment.

Verdict This is a bulky piece of equipment, you'll only use it for a few minutes at a time and, apart from novelty value, it doesn't offer significant benefit over other abdominal exercises such as crunches or bent-knee lying twists – provided they're performed correctly. Spend your money on a session with an exercise physiologist who can teach you how to do the correct moves without equipment.

Bowflex Treadclimber TC10

COST $3999 (REDUCED TO $3000 WHEN WE RANG TO RETURN IT) FROM BRAND DEVELOPERS

What is it? Essentially a cross between a treadmill, stepper and elliptical trainer, the Treadclimber consists of two treadmill belts that allow you to step up and down (hence the "climber" bit of the name) as you walk forwards. It's designed for walking, offering a speed range of 0.8-6.4km/h.

Abdoer Twist

COST $199.80 + 19.95 P&H FROM DANOZ DIRECT.

IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK

What is it? A chair with a flexible spine and handgrips - you use your abs to work against the resistance of the spine, shifting it back and forth, side to side, and other movements. It comes with a DVD featuring workouts for different fitness levels.

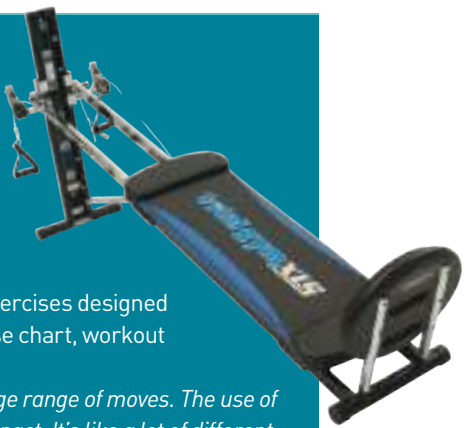
Jesse says *This is quite good: it encourages good posture, supports weight, which can be useful for some people, and allows you to focus on core muscles. However, this focus means its usefulness is limited, and sitting isn't the best way for most people to exercise. It could double as a desk chair!*

User review Our triallists weren't impressed, mainly because of the limited range of exercises, its bulk, and because it was too easy – although you can buy a kit with additional resistance rods (for about $70) to increase the difficulty.

Verdict If you want a novel way of exercising your core muscles, this model could be worth your while – especially if you pay for increased resistance. However, you can get a similar effect without equipment, just as with the Ab Coaster (see opposite).

Total Gym XLS

COST $2500 (REDUCED TO $1250 WHEN WE RANG TO RETURN IT) PLUS $49.95 P&H FROM BRAND DEVELOPERS



What is it? Consisting of a sliding padded bench operated by cables and running along an adjustable incline, the Total Gym XLS uses your body weight to create resistance, and offers more than 60 different exercises designed to work all major muscle groups. It includes an exercise chart, workout cards and workout DVDs.

Jesse says *This would be great for beginners, with a huge range of moves. The use of body weight means it's not overwhelming, and it's low impact. It's like a lot of different machines in one. It seems to be sturdy and well built, although expensive for what it is.*

User review Our triallists liked that it offers a variety of resistance workouts and accommodates different levels of fitness. But the size, cost and potential boredom put them off.

Verdict Great for strength training, this machine works all major muscle groups and, as you get stronger, you can add weights and a weight bar – it holds up to 180kg, including your body and added weights. The main limitation is that you have to be motivated to use it. It has a big footprint, and is heavy and awkward to set up and pack away, so unless you can leave it out you may not use it very often.

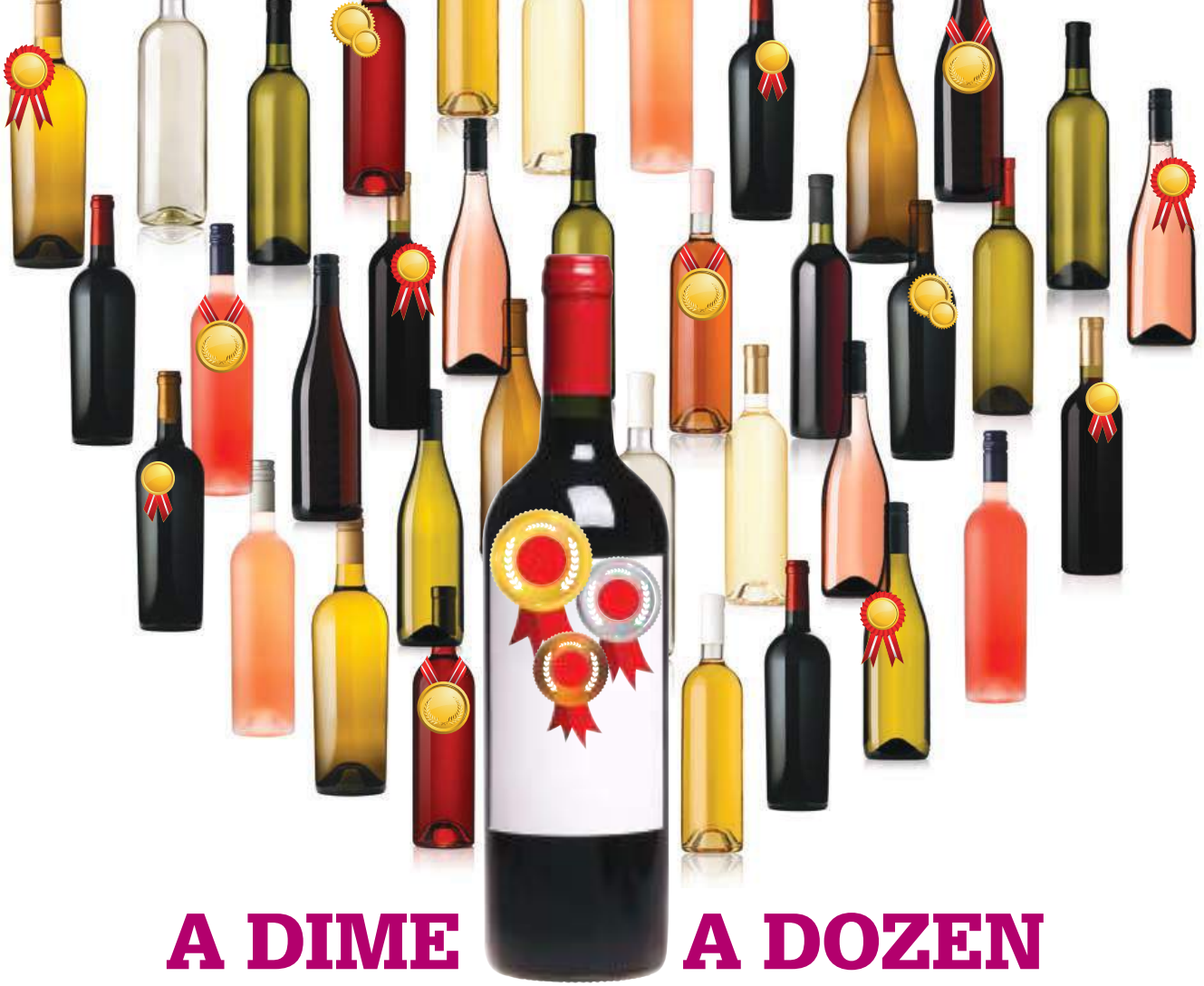
Jesse says *The movement engages the core, more so than a regular treadmill, and it's low impact, which is good for some people. However, the stride length is quite short, and there's not much space to swing your arms – though at first you'll be holding the handlebar for balance. It does seem to get the heart rate up.*

User review It doesn't feel solid, and you need to pay attention – you couldn't watch TV while using it. And it's noisy, too.

Verdict Jesse says this would be good for rehabilitation or for people who could benefit from the balance training, as long as they use it safely. It might also be useful training for Sunday walkers or hikers. However, its usefulness is limited due to the low speed, especially for fitter people, and you could get a more versatile treadmill with more features and programs at a lower price. (Keep an eye out for our review of treadmills later this year.)

What to look for

- All these machines require you to focus on what you're doing – counting repetitions, or maintaining speed, balance and/or form. If you want to watch TV while exercising, keep this in mind.
- Most offer some kind of satisfaction guarantee – so if you don't like it, return it. We were offered a discount in two cases when we rang to test these guarantees.
- The workouts should be challenging enough to make you work harder as you get fitter. Stick with them and you should find you'll quickly improve.
- Some machines require a lot of floor space, so make sure you have room.
- Equipment for short-term goals, such as weight loss, can be cheaper and less sturdy. For longer-term lifestyle goals, you'll benefit from better-quality, more versatile equipment with a lower boredom factor. ■



A DIME A DOZEN

Is that medal on a wine label a genuine indicator of good quality, or merely a marketing ploy? **Rachel Clemons** looks closer

You may just be after a cheap and cheerful drop to enjoy with your meal on a Friday after work. Or perhaps you're in the market for a quality tipple to give as a gift (turn to page 54 for the best wine fridges in which to store it). Whatever the case, a medal (or three or four) on a wine label can grab your attention, and help narrow your choice. But how reliable are they? We set out to determine the value of wine show awards as a tool for choosing a good wine.

Medal marketing

Medals on bottles certainly help sell wine. According to one industry source: "It's evident in our sales figures for particular brands that consumers are more highly engaged when the bottle has 'bling' on it. For instance, we currently have two very good wines from the Clare Valley, one of which won the International Riesling Challenge. We're now out of stock on the blinged-up wine, while the other wine is still slowly trickling through." And in the lower and middle price points in particular, people are more likely to choose a gold-medal-winning wine over another, according to research.

You can pay more for medal winners too. A review of more than 2500 wines entered into the four major Australian wine shows across popular varietals Shiraz, Chardonnay, and Cabernet Sauvignon released between 2003 and 2007 found medal-winning wines – particularly those with gold and silver gongs – command higher release prices than other wines.

Award overload

And there's no shortage of medals awarded at wine shows either. The 2013 Royal Melbourne Wine Awards alone awarded 1389 medals – that's 44% of the wines entered in the competition. Great news for the medal winners, but the result is a bit of a medal minefield for consumers.

When people see a bronze, silver or gold medal, they often make the understandable assumption that those medals were awarded to first, second and third place-winners. But the fact is, all wine show entrants that receive a score over a certain number receive a medal.

Our social media call-out on this issue indicated that some people ignore wine medals completely, preferring to base their

choice on peer recommendations, tasting notes, advice from bottle shop staff or simply their own preferences. Some take wine medals at face value. "They should be a sign of a decent wine," says Liz P. But many seem to be either unsure of what they represent or even sceptical about their validity. "Only if a medal is from a 'known show'," says Graham T. "Most are awarded by their own company," says Matthew C. "There are just too many different 'competitions' and awards and who knows what the criteria are," says Germana E.

"I'm not sure that consumers are winning out of the wine show system," says Mike Bennie, wine writer and presenter. "Consumers can have confidence that a group of peers who are experts at what they do have judged the wine well. But because of the pure volume of award recipients, shiny medals on bottles are becoming impotent – their value is diminishing."

Navigating the medals

- Trophy winners are the best gold medal winner in the show, and will have been tasted several times and rated against other gold medal-winning wines.
- A gold medal from a major state capital city show is a good indicator that the wine is of high quality and has been compared with many others in its class.
- Don't ignore awards from regional or other reputable wine shows, especially if you're after a particular style. If you're a fan of chardonnay, for example, a trophy from the James Halliday Chardonnay Challenge is worth looking out for.
- Silver medals are easier to achieve than gold, but they're still a good indicator of high quality. A bronze medal indicates the wine is of sound quality, perhaps slightly above average.

Making the wine show system more relevant for consumers

Traditionally, agricultural shows (of which all the early wine shows were part) were aimed at winemakers and "improving the breed", or, essentially, the quality of wine. But more recently, the mission of capital city wine shows in particular has had dual purpose: maintaining a focus on winemakers by promoting excellence in wine, and connecting with consumers.

Improvements that have been made to the wine show system include:

- **A reduction in the size of tasting classes** "There are now 20-30 wines in a bracket, down from 50-60," says Samantha Connew, Chair of Judges at the Sydney Royal Wine Show. "And the number of wines tasted by judges in a day is down to 130, from as many as 200." A criticism of larger tasting classes was that for a wine to stand out it needed to be a 'blockbuster', meaning high-quality but more subtle, elegant wines don't perform as well. "More subtle wines are now quite commonly rewarded," says Nick Bulleid, independent wine industry consultant.
- **Inclusion of more consumer-oriented judges** "Panel members have moved away from solely winemakers to include retailers, sales and marketing people, sommeliers and wine writers. At the Sydney Royal Wine Show it's half and half," says Connew.
- **A shift to the 100-point scoring system** This system is consistent with that used internationally and domestically by many journalists and critics, and according to Connew, it engages more with both the domestic and international consumer. "A 92-point score, for example, can be more relevant than a silver medal for consumers, who may think that – as at the Olympics – gold, silver and bronze are just allocated to first, second and third place-getters," she says.
- **Improved diversity in the competition** "Minimum volume requirements, which were a barrier to entry for some small companies, have been reduced," says Bulleid. The Royal Melbourne Wine Awards, for example, reported an increase in entrant diversity in 2013, with 550 companies submitting wine (although this still only represents approximately 20% of all Australian producers).

But some issues still remain.

- **The proliferation of wine shows has muddied the waters and diluted their value for consumers** Wine industry portal Winebiz lists 66 shows in Australia alone, and there are many more overseas. For every type of wine there seems to be an appropriate wine show to showcase it, whether it's made from an alternative variety or organically grown grape, by a small or boutique winemaker or an amateur. Those involved in the capital city wine shows in particular are critical of many so-called "pseudo-national, private enterprise" shows – as well as the large companies that enter them to achieve a maximum 'bling rate' on their bottles – saying the shows are making money but not providing useful feedback to the exhibitors, and they're not needed by winemakers or consumers.
- **The marketing value of show awards can result in the misuse of medals** As well as disadvantaging producers who only display legitimate show medals on the label, this practice is misleading for consumers as well (see overleaf).

IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK

Medal meddling

A decade ago, the practice of putting 'medals' on wine bottles to make it appear they'd won awards went relatively unchecked, with claims such as "gold medal standard wine", "big wine of the year", "best barbecue red", or even "750ml" appearing on bottles in gold medal-like discs.

In order to preserve the integrity of wine show awards, the Australian wine industry created a code of practice governing the display of awards on bottles, targeting deceptive use of medals. The code has been enforced on all wine produced from the 2005 vintage onwards.

We found an imported wine using a gold disc to indicate the year the brand was established; a wine displaying gold medals for awards relating to the winemaker and producer, but not that particular wine; and a wine displaying a silver medal for an award from a wine magazine. While the awards themselves are genuine, the way they're labelled can cause confusion as it isn't immediately obvious they're not specific to the wine they appear on or they're not from a wine show.

We flagged these discrepancies with the Winemakers' Federation of Australia, and while it has no remit over the imported wine, it's investigating the others. "When we find a wine that is in breach of the code we notify the wine company of this," general manager Tony Battaglene told us. "We often find that it is an oversight due to a lack of communication from marketing teams. We have found in the past that most breaches are unintentional, and there is a lot of goodwill out there in trying to comply and ensure consumers aren't misled."

Some bottle labels can cause confusion as it's not immediately obvious that the awards aren't specific to the wines they appear on

According to the code, the only time you should see a medal-like symbol on a bottle is when that wine has been in a wine show and been awarded gold, silver or bronze. The medal should bear the name of the show, year of the award and the class description. But a quick browse through the local bottle shop (and some attention to the small print) revealed a few bottles sailing close to the wind.

Unlike Olympians, wines aren't awarded medals on a first/second/third basis

CHOICE verdict

Medals or trophies on bottles can help you quickly discern good wines from ordinary wines and reduce your risk of making a bad choice, particularly if you're a novice. Use wine show medals as a guide, but don't rely on them completely. Ratings published in books such as *James Halliday's Australian Wine Companion*, in wine magazines, or by wine critics in papers and online are useful resources also. As Bulleid sums up neatly: "Preferences vary hugely amongst individual consumers. Just because a wine has a medal, [that] won't guarantee that all consumers will like it."

The best wines in the shows get the gold medals, but the best wines aren't always in the shows, so don't be concerned if the wine you like boasts no medals. Not all winemakers agree with the wine show system and prefer the customer to judge their wines, or they simply might not have had a sample ready at the time of entry into the show.

The code is currently scheduled for review. In order to maintain the value and relevance of wine show medals for consumers, we believe it needs to be regularly promoted and endorsed by wine shows and compliance with the code actively monitored. Other legitimate awards need to be easily distinguished from wine show medals, and breaches of the code and subsequent penalties should be publicised. ■

Little kids, big savings?

Bank accounts aimed at kids may offer good interest rates to lure them in, but there are some hidden traps, says **Uta Mihm**

Helping your child open a bank account is a great way to introduce them to the concept of saving and what banking is all about. So you'd think banks would make kids' savings accounts as simple as possible – but our comparison found some very confusing conditions.

The good news is that the vast majority of kids' savings accounts offer interest rates close to the rates currently offered by high-interest online savings accounts. The bad news is that there are conditions attached to these good rates. They're usually only available if you make at least one deposit per month, and the minimum deposits can be more than what your child earns in pocket money. To earn the bonus interest with a Bankwest's Kids' Bonus Saver account, for example, the minimum deposit is $25 per month.

More stings in the tail

Once your child reaches their savings goal and withdraws their money, they're often hit with a huge interest rate cut. If they make a withdrawal from the kids' savings accounts from ANZ, CBA and Westpac, for example, their interest rate for that month drops to a meagre 0.01%.

To make matters worse, Credit UnionAustralia (CUA) charges kids a hefty $20 fee for making a withdrawal in their branch. And Bankwest may even teach your kids that banks can't be trusted: after paying the best interest rate for one year, they sweep all but $1 into a low-interest account paying just one per cent for amounts up to $3000.

That banks can be greedy is another lesson kids may learn from the coin-counting fees charged by a range of institutions. While the majority of banks and credit unions don't charge these fees to customers or exclude kids from the piggybank fees, others don't make this clear. Suncorp, for example, has a five per cent coin-counting fee. The bank told us they wouldn't charge kids this fee, but we couldn't find this assurance in any of the public official material (though we were told it's noted in their internal procedure manual). We don't think that's good enough – just imagine if your child was charged this fee in error. That would be so discouraging for little savers.

On top of this, the ATO pays close attention to kids' income from interest, and high tax rates apply – see page 28.

CHOICE verdict

When it comes to kids' bank accounts, look beyond the interest rate and make sure the conditions suit you and your child. The two accounts with the highest rates, CUA and Bankwest, both have big disadvantages.

In the end you may be better off with one of the big banks, as they give your child the best chance to get a face-to-face banking experience in one of their branches. ANZ, CBA and Westpac all charge no fees (NAB no longer offers a specific children's account). The CBA also offers an educational school banking program that has been adopted by almost half the primary schools across Australia (see overleaf).

IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK

Tops

Commonwealth Bank (CBA) Youth Saver

PROS

- School banking program. If your child's school is one of the 47% of primary schools offering the CBA's program, encourage them to participate in it. The rewards program is based on the number of deposits rather than the amount deposited. So whether your child deposits five cents or $5 on school banking day that week, they'll receive a rewards token. After 10 deposits, children can choose a reward ranging from a moneybox to scented pencils or a handball. The schools receive a commission of $5 per account activated, plus 5% of the money deposited.
- Large branch network.
- While a deposit is required for the bonus interest, there is no minimum.
- No fees.

CONS

- Base rate is only 0.01%; bonus rate (one deposit per month and no withdrawals) is 3.81%.

Suncorp Kids Savings Account

PROS

- OK base interest rate of 1.5%; bonus interest rate is 4% if you make a deposit.
- The only account with a bonus interest rate that allows one withdrawal per month without an interest rate penalty.
- No fees.

CONS

- One of the highest minimum deposits required for bonus interest – $20 per month.
- Suncorp charges a 5% coin-counting fee. The bank has assured us they won't charge this for your kid's piggybank, however there's no exception noted in their public official material.

Westpac Reward Saver

PROS

- Large branch network.
- While a deposit is required for the bonus interest, there is no minimum.
- No fees.

CONS

- Base rate is only 0.01%; bonus rate (one deposit per month and no withdrawals) is 3.71%.

ANZ Progress Saver (Kids)

PROS

- Large branch network.
- No fees.

CONS

- Base rate is only 0.01%; bonus rate (one deposit per month and no withdrawals) is 3.71%.
- Minimum required deposit for bonus interest: $10 per month.

Mind the tax

Once kids earn more than $416 in interest, steep tax rates apply.

- Amounts above $416 up to $1307 are taxed at 66%.
- Amounts above $1307: the whole amount is taxed at 45%.
- No Medicare Levy applies so long as your child's income is below the low-income earner threshold ($20,542 in 2013-14).
- Once the income is above $416, your child must also lodge a tax return.
- Depending on the interest rate, $416 interest could be paid on an account balance of between $7000 and $11,000.

Exemptions apply for children:

- who work full-time, or
- with certain disabilities.

Other income, such as from a part-time job, is taxed at normal rates. The low-income tax threshold also applies to this income, but not to the interest earned.

Flops

Bankwest Kids' Bonus Saver: Nasty conditions for little savers

Unfortunately, we found the account with the most generous interest rate on offer, 5.75%, is also the most complex one.

- Maximum opening deposit of $250.
- Each month you must deposit at least $25 but not more than $250.
- If you make any withdrawals, the interest drops to 0.01% in that month.

And there is a big catch with this account. At the one-year anniversary of the account, all but $1 is automatically transferred into the Bankwest Children's Savings Account, which has a very low interest rate:

- 1% up to $2999
- 2% up to $9999
- 2.70% up to $19,999
- 4.5% for amounts above $20,000

The ATO also has strict rules about whether the income belongs to the child or the parent. The ATO considers the interest to be your income, and so it must be declared on your tax return, if you:

- transfer money into the account, or
- use some of it, even if it's for the child or on their behalf (for example, to pay for child care or school fees).

For the interest to apply to your child, the money must be genuinely gifted to them and you must not intend to use it. To find out more, check with the ATO on 13 28 61 or ato.gov.au

IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK & THINKSTOCK

CUA Youth eSaver: Little kids, big fees

At first we did not trust our eyes when we read that kids are charged $20 for a branch withdrawal. CUA sees this account as an online savings account only and obviously wants to discourage kids from coming into the branch. It's a shame, because this account would otherwise have found a place on our recommended list. It pays 5.05% interest for the first $5000 and 3.25% for any amount above that, and doesn't require a monthly deposit.

Penny pinchers

The wooden spoons for the lowest interest rate for balances up to $500 go to:
Community First Power Up – 0.1%
Illawarra Credit Union
Junior Saver – 0.25%
Community First Pocket Power – 0.5%
Greater Building Society
Little Bucks – 0.5%
SCU BU Account,
Super Saver Club – 0.5%
Queenslanders Credit Union
Junior Savers – 0.5%

A dishonourable mention in this category also goes to IMB Reward Saver Kick Start. This account pays zilch interest in a month unless a $20 deposit is made. But this at least is arguably a bit more honest than most other accounts paying a pitiful 0.01% if you don't qualify for the bonus interest. ■

For more on kids' bank accounts, including a table comparing all the accounts available, log on to **choice.com.au/kidsbankaccounts**

Charity cases

Do products that claim to contribute to worthy causes actually make a difference? **Jemma Castle** investigates

Among the many product labels you see when browsing supermarket shelves, you'll often find some that claim to support a good cause. But is the product maker really helping a charity when you buy their products, or is this just a marketing ploy designed to exploit your sympathies?

Who benefits?

Cause-related marketing, as it's known, should be a win for all parties involved. So says Hailey Cavill, who's been developing cause-related partnerships between companies and charities for almost 20 years through her business Cavill + Co. However, depending on how well the partnership has been arranged, some campaigns can be more effective than others.

While the emotional part of our brain may be moved by a brand's decision to align with a charity, it's important to remember that the brand has often made this decision for business reasons. "[Brands] can see a sales increase of up to 5-10% [as a result of cause-related marketing]," says Cavill.

As well as potentially increasing sales, partnering with a charity can also have a positive influence on the way consumers view a brand. Research in 2012 found that cause-related marketing has a greater impact on how consumers think about a brand than other marketing strategies, such as sales promotions or sponsorship – provided the charity and brand were a good fit.

But does it help the charity?

"Cause-related marketing can generate significant funds for vital causes," says Rob Edwards, CEO of the Fundraising Institute of Australia (FIA). Provided all relevant laws are being abided by, and it's in line with its Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct, the FIA has no issue with it.

But it's probably fair to say that we can't just shop our way to a better planet. Cavill argues that, in general, the amount raised through cause-related marketing is quite a small part of a charity's overall fundraising budget. Despite this, she argues the money raised can be critical as it is untied, meaning it doesn't have to be earmarked for a particular purpose.

Reaping the benefits

For many charities, piggybacking on a giant multinational's marketing campaign (and budget) is a huge potential benefit. But whether this is actually the case is contested. US research on college students in 2011 suggests consumers who buy products linked to social causes are less likely to then donate to a charity.

But Hailey Cavill (see below left) disagrees, pointing out that her work with Sweeney Research in 2008, which used a sample representative of the Australian population, found 47% of consumers would consider donating to the charity that's associated with a particular product.

In order for charitable marketing to be beneficial to all parties, surely the money given to charities should come out of the brand's bottom line rather than consumers' wallets? That way, everyone wins – charities receive a financial benefit, consumers help the charity without paying for it, and the brand reaps a marketing reward. Unfortunately, however, it's very difficult for consumers to know whether or not prices have been inflated to include the charitable contribution. If they have, it's akin to consumers paying the charity while the brand just reaps the marketing reward.

IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK

It's not always easy for consumers to know how much money is actually being given to a charity

"A lot of charities are good at getting tied income from government sponsorships, [but] the hardest thing is [getting] untied money they can use to pay staff and so on," says Cavill. One such example is the partnership she secured between Vaalia and the Murdoch Childrens Research Institute, which has been able to fund experimental research as a result of untied money.

How does cause-related marketing work?

Partnerships between charities and brands can be done in various ways, which can make it confusing for consumers. So it pays to read the fine print to make sure you know where your money is going.

Cavill arranges partnerships by setting a total pre-agreed amount based on current sales figures. Many products aligning with charities still specify a set amount such as 20c per sale, or a percentage amount of the recommended retail price (RRP). But if the total amount has been pre-arranged, as Cavill identifies, then the brand must print the right amount of promotional packages, for example, to match the agreement.

Some brands can be vague about the amount they give. Winemakers Banrock Station, for example, say "part proceeds of every glass you enjoy supports environmental projects around the world". When we asked Banrock Station how much was donated per sale, they said it is calculated based on the volume of wine sold but didn't provide specific figures. However, they did say they have raised more than $6m since 1995 for their own environmental trust, which equates to a little over $300,000 each year.

"As long as the company is genuinely contributing a decent sum of money, then it's a win-win," says Cavill. She suggests that just looking at the amount given per pack could be misleading. It's better to look at the total amount the brand is giving as it gives a better idea as to whether or not it's a meaningful amount, she argues, as different products have different profit margins and sales rates.

But it's not always easy for consumers to know how much money is being given to a charity in total. When we asked around various brands, we found that there isn't much transparency. A spokesperson for Cotton On told us it "do[es] not like to communicate this figure externally", while the director of Madura, Ron Ford, told us the contract they have with the Cancer Council was confidential. However, Madura does say on the branded box of teas that it donates five per cent of the RRP.

Seeing pink

In some cases, cause-related marketing can actually make up a significant proportion of a charity's overall income. Each year, around 80 partners use the National Breast Cancer Foundation's (NCBF) pink ribbon logo to help raise around $5m for research, which equates to about 20-25% of the charity's income.

However, the sheer number of NCBF partnerships leaves consumers open to confusion. Carole Renouf, CEO of NCBF, told CHOICE that a number of other organisations are supporting women with breast cancer through other means and they are "entitled" to use the colour pink. "NCBF does not own 'pink' nor do we own the pink ribbon," she says.

Since other unofficial partners are able to use the breast cancer ribbon and the colour pink, it can be difficult for consumers to know what cause they are actually supporting. Pantene Pro-V's Daily Moisture Renewal Shampoo, for example, displays a ribbon similar to the well-known NCBF ribbon, with the words "supporting women with cancer". It's not unreasonable for a shopper to think that by purchasing the product, a percentage of the sale price would go to the NCBF. But that's not actually the case; rather, it's a Pantene campaign encouraging women to cut off their ponytails so that wigs can be made for women with cancer.

Always keep in mind that cause-related marketing is most likely a business transaction

There are also partnerships where there's no mention of money. Kimberley-Clark's Viva paper towels use WWF's logo, along with a Love Your Forests campaign. "WWF receives a licensing fee for use of the panda logo from Kimberley-Clark, but the fee is not linked to how many units are sold," a spokesperson for Kimberley-Clark told us.

Kimberley-Clark points out the Love Your Forests campaign is not about fundraising but rather about promoting awareness of sustainable forestry. While the program is arguably genuine and is raising awareness, not money, for WWF, Kimberley-Clark's sales and market share have increased as a result of the partnership. Consumers who don't pay attention to the finer details could quite easily assume at a glance that a proportion of the money they spend on Viva paper towels does go to WWF.

Are consumers buying it?

Despite the potential for brands to increase sales as a result of cause-related marketing, consumers' support for it has been waning. Cavill's research in 2008 found almost one in four people said they had switched from a usual product to one supporting a charity, but that's since dropped to around one in six.

One gripe consumers have with this sort of marketing is that it may simply be a token gesture to win more customers without making their businesses more ethical. When we asked your thoughts about this on our Facebook page, Kathleen said she "prefers to support companies that respect people, animals and the environment. If they can get this right, then we don't need the remedial action of charities".

Ivan thinks the practice is unethical. "Excess profits should be applied to improving the product, improving employee conditions, rewarding investors and paying taxes, not a cabal of 'old boys' making dubious charity choices for us."

This growing scepticism among consumers has served to keep brands more honest and transparent, argues Cavill. "It doesn't serve them to be dishonest with vigilante consumerism rife."

Make sure you're not cause-washed

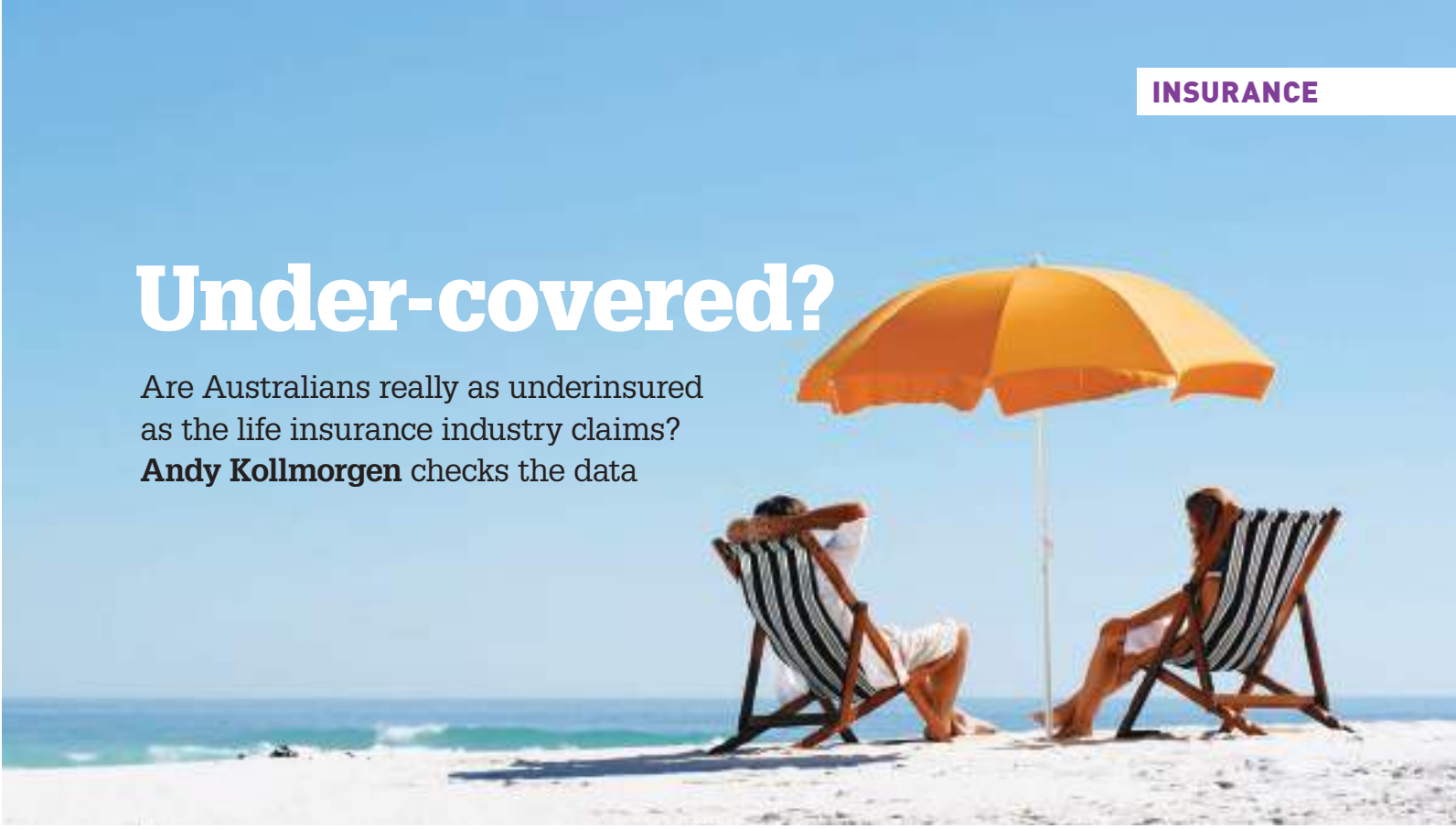
- **Check the price** Are prices inflated compared to other similar products on the market?
- **Only buy products you actually want** Otherwise, you're better off directly donating the money yourself.
- **Check the label** Product-cause partnerships should be transparent about how much is being contributed (if any) to the charity as a product amount, percentage or total amount.

CHOICE verdict

Cause-related marketing promotions offer consumers the opportunity to make a small contribution to a good cause, but it can't replace actual giving. These promotions can be effective for charities, but always keep in mind that cause-related marketing is most likely a business transaction. ■

Under-covered?

Are Australians really as underinsured as the life insurance industry claims? **Andy Kollmorgen** checks the data



There are a lot of warnings out there about Australians not having enough life insurance or related types of cover – and a lot of those warnings are coming from the insurance industry itself.

The online insurance information service Lifewise, for instance, cites data showing that half of industry superannuation fund members need at least $100,000 more life insurance cover than they currently have. "Australia has proved to be one of the most underinsured nations in the developed world," Lifewise concludes.

It's worth noting, however, that Lifewise is an initiative of the Australian life insurance industry. And the data came from a 2008 survey arranged by two other financial services industry heavyweights – the Australian Institute of Superannuation Trustees and Industry Funds Forum.

The survey also yielded a few other troubling facts about industry fund members:

- 74% are underinsured by $100,000 for total and permanent disability (TPD)
- 45% are underinsured by $1000 a month for income protection.

SO JUST HOW MUCH LIFE INSURANCE DO YOU NEED?

Data from an independent Rice Warner report offers a guideline for two representative parenting life stages (see page 34). But figuring out the size of the life insurance payout you'll need to cover your debts and household expenses, provide for your dependants and allow them to maintain the lifestyle to which they're accustomed is not an easy calculation, since circumstances vary widely.

Many super fund websites provide calculators that can be a helpful, if inexact, tool. In general, you should aim to provide your survivors with at least 10 times your annual salary, and also think about having enough to cover these five critical financial commitments in your absence:

- Any remaining debts (such as credit card or car loans) and foreseeable expenses, including funeral costs
- Enough cash in a lump sum to make up for your lost income for a reasonable period of time (say, five to seven years)
- Enough to pay off your mortgage
- Educations costs for your children
- Enough to substantially fund your partner's retirement

42%

Proportion of Australians with enough life cover for their survivors to maintain their standard of living

37%

Proportion of the working population with income protection cover*

* SOURCE: RICE WARNER, *UNDERINSURANCE IN AUSTRALIA*, NOVEMBER 2013
IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK

They would say that, wouldn't they?

But are we really dangerously underinsured, or is this just a case of the insurance industry scaring us into buying more insurance? The perception that the industry is spruiking its products was recently raised by Brett Clark, CEO of insurance broker TAL Life, who told the industry website riskinfo.com.au that messages "which appear to be very self-serving" aren't helping the underinsurance problem.

It's also worth noting that financial adviser commissions for life insurance products are among the highest – generally between 90% and 110% of the first premium payment and up to 13% of annual premium payments until the policy matures, according to a recent Fairfax article.

Two more recent research projects suggest the industry has a point. A KPMG report found 55% of Australian employees were underinsured to the tune of a collective $304bn – or 63% short of the coverage we should have. But once again, the report was commissioned by the Financial Services Council, which represents financial services providers, including insurance companies.

An independent view?

A Rice Warner report released in November 2013 backs up the KPMG findings, saying that unless you have a payout of close to a million dollars lined up, you may be underinsured if you want your dependants to be able to maintain their standard of living. Rice Warner's report was independently produced, "without funding or influence from the insurance industry".

While the report shows the life insurance gap has significantly narrowed over the previous nine years, particularly for lower-income workers, it also says "the median level of cover is still only 64% of basic needs and 42% of the amount required to ensure that family members and dependents [sic] can maintain their standard of living after the death of a parent or partner".

Rice Warner crunched the numbers for average family scenarios (see below).

The Rice Warner researchers had a few recommendations f or the super industry as well as the government, to reduce what they call "glaring distortions and inequities" in the insurance market.

Recommendations for the super industry include:

- Tailoring cover levels for younger ages to avoid over-providing life insurance cover
- Maintaining cover at older ages instead of gradually reducing it
- Encouraging fund members to keep their cover up to date by reporting life changes, such as having dependent children
- Increasing TPD/income protections to meet current needs

Recommendations for government:

- State governments should remove stamp duty from life, income and TPD protections provided by general insurers
- Remove GST on income protection and TPD insurance provided by general insurers
- Equalise the tax treatment of risk insurance inside and outside of superannuation

Insurance needs for parents aged 30

$640,000 to provide a basic level of life cover

$1,000,000 to provide an income replacement level of life cover

$940,000 of TPD cover

$4900 per month of income protection

Insurance needs for parents aged 50

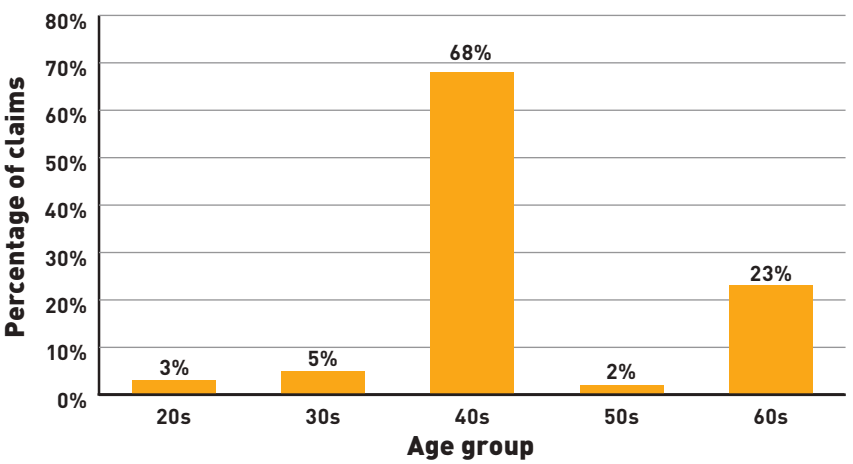
$420,000 to provide a basic level of life cover

$650,000 to provide an income replacement level of life cover

$670,000 of TPD cover

$5600 per month of income protection

Percentage of trauma insurance claims by age group

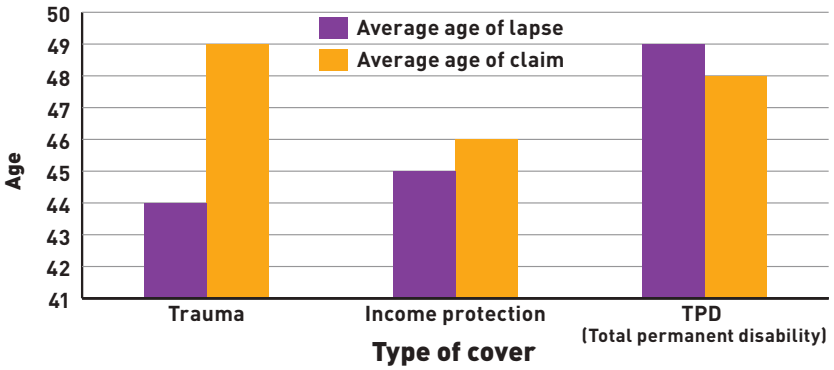


Bailing out too soon?

Research by Asteron Life (part of the Suncorp group) in 2013 suggested that Australians let their life insurance policies and related cover lapse about five years too soon, and that the vast majority of trauma, income protection and TPD claims are made by people in their 40s.

The average age at which Australians let their cover lapse is 44, Asteron says, while the average age at which claims are made is 49.

Average ages for letting risk cover lapse



Five things you need to know about life insurance

1 Duty of disclosure Insurance claims can be knocked back if you fail to disclose everything to the insurer. This includes information such as being a heavy smoker, being involved in risky sports or activities, having a serious health issue or a terminal illness, drug use or having a mental health condition. You can still likely get cover if you have a pre-existing condition, but you may have to pay more for it.

2 Work or recreational risk Some work or recreational activities are considered high risk by insurers and may affect your application for life insurance – but you still need to tell them about it. You'll still be able to get cover if you work in a dangerous working environment such as mining or construction, or are into bungee jumping or car racing, but be prepared to pay more for it. If you fail to divulge such details and meet your fate while involved in one of these risky activities, your beneficiaries may be left empty-handed.

3 Update your details It's all too easy to buy life insurance – or have it as a default inclusion with your super account – and then forget about it. But you should always keep an eye on your level of cover. If you take out a policy and then have children, move house or get a better-paying job, you may become underinsured if you don't make a change. It's also important to let your beneficiaries know you have a policy and how to the contact the provider in the event of your death. ASIC holds unclaimed life money due from insurance companies or friendly societies for three years after the policy matures. ASIC's Unclaimed Money Search database goes back to 1952 for life insurance companies, and back to 2000 for friendly societies.

4 Understand your policy Every life insurance policy has its own inclusions and exclusions, so make sure you read and understand the policy documents or product disclosure statement (PDS). It's generally not good to wait to find out what is and isn't covered until after you file a claim. If you're covered under a group insurance plan through your superannuation fund, ASIC requires the fund to make your insurance benefits clear.

5 Binding nomination vs preferred beneficiary For life insurance inside superannuation accounts, it's important to make a binding nomination regarding who will receive the proceeds when the policy matures (i.e. when you die or are incapacitated). The alternative to this is naming a preferred beneficiary. In this case, the super fund manager can investigate to make sure there are no other eligible recipients, such as a former spouse. ■

SOURCE: ASTERON LIFE IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK

Top of the world

Tabletop games are defying the dazzle of technology and making a triumphant return to living rooms, says **Peter Zaluzny**

Board games are back and in a big way, with growing legions of new fans flocking to clubs and conventions to get in on the action. While computer games can be visually dazzling, players are discovering that old-fashioned tabletop games actually offer a superior social experience, while experts suggest they can even benefit your brain.

Most people will be familiar with old family game stalwarts such as Monopoly and Scrabble. But it's the more challenging titles, such as Settlers of Catan, Ticket to Ride and even Dungeons & Dragons, that are experiencing a resurgence in mainstream popularity. So just why are people going back to the tabletop?

Board games are enjoying a resurgence in popularity

From clubs to conventions

Board games are a part of most people's childhood. Odds are you have a few fond memories of playing them with your family, and you'd be hard-pressed to find a house that doesn't have at least one favourite board game that's occasionally fished out when the power goes out.

While these games can occupy a nostalgic place in our hearts, in the past decade they've been overshadowed by a world of PCs, smartphones, tablets and artificial intelligence. For many, the physical dice and board are seen as dusty relics of the past. But a new and diverse group of game players is catching on to an older generation of more challenging multi-player tabletop games, suggesting that it's the human element that makes these games rewarding.

We spoke to many industry experts and found that in the past couple of years, tabletop games have started to find a broader audience, with clubs booming across the country. Once just an overseas phenomenon, large games conventions such as the Penny Arcade Expo (PAX) are now held in Australia, with dedicated tabletop gaming areas that are growing quite rapidly.

Like classic family titles such as Monopoly, tabletop games can be played using a traditional board and movable

The train-themed game Ticket to Ride is a popular choice for newcomers

pieces. But unlike traditional games they usually involve more elements, including various types of cards and often a rather complex rulebook, sometimes called a codex. Tabletop games fall into several different categories, from the easy-to-learn so-called "gateway" games such as Ticket to Ride and Settlers of Catan, to miniature war games such as Warhammer and role-playing games including Dungeons & Dragons (D&D).

Although there's no single reason for the resurgence, some people, such as tabletop veteran Ian Houlihan, cite increased recognition in mainstream media as a factor. Houlihan used to run one of the biggest board game conventions in Australia, Gen Con Aus, and although it closed its doors in 2010, Houlihan went on to launch the tabletop section at the inaugural PAX Australia in 2013. He's seen geeky pastimes make their way into popular culture, which has brought more attention to tabletop.

"I think there's been a certain push in more recent times, and the likes of [TV show] *The Big Bang Theory* has had a lot to do with it," he argues. "I think it's also due to shows like *Game of Thrones* and even *The Walking Dead* – big shows that everyone seems to love. People are becoming desensitised to the whole nerd culture, [and] those sorts of shows make a big difference to the acceptability of things like fantasy, sci-fi and nerd culture."

Others claim that crossover titles based on video games such as World of Warcraft are capturing the interest of video game fans, acting as a gateway to the hobby. Tabletop games have also been a surprisingly big hit on dedicated web channels such as Geek and Sundry, which has a web series called Tabletop hosted by actor, writer and all-round geek icon Wil Wheaton, with an ever-changing guest list of pop culture celebrities.

What's the attraction?

Tabletop games are often larger and more complex than traditional board game titles, relying on imagination and strategic thinking. Houlihan says that at this level, the definition of a "classic" game is completely different. "I attended a seminar where the lead marketing person from [game maker] Hasbro got up and said, 'if someone came to us with Monopoly today, we'd reject it'.

Tabletop games can rely on a lot more imagination and strategic thinking

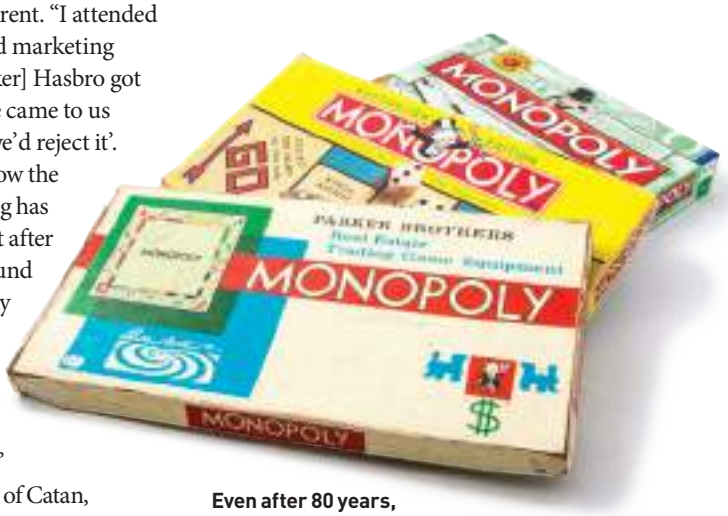
"That boils down to how the nature of tabletop gaming has changed. They're not just after games where you go around in a circle until somebody wins; they're after immersion. There needs to be a story behind what's going on; there needs to be tactics."

Games such as Settlers of Catan, which is based around trading resources to build a society, are combining this rich storytelling with a new approach to gaming that encourages players to interact and negotiate to complete a particular goal. Living room standards such as Trivial Pursuit still have their place, but they're relatively simplistic by comparison. These narrative elements, combined with in-depth game play, are thought to offer a more rewarding experience.

Brain boosters

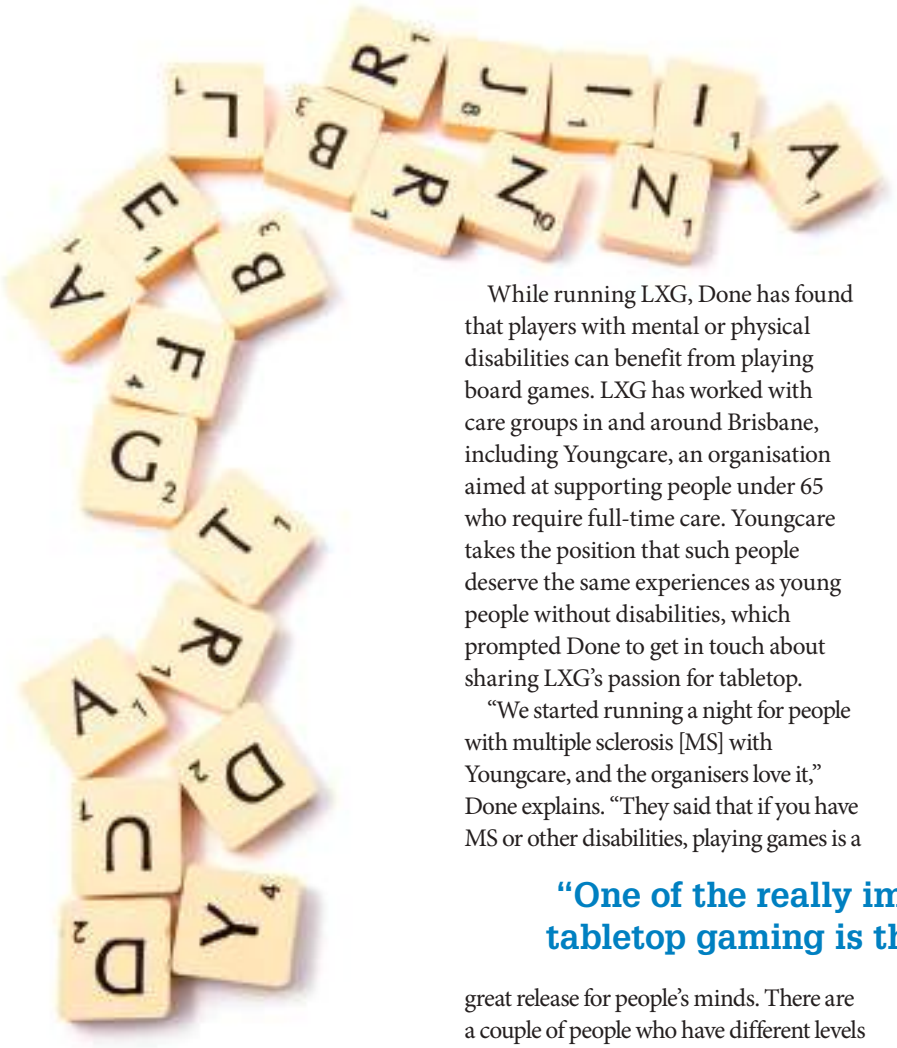
Tabletop games demand constant attention – even the simplest games are built on rules that require learning and regular thought processing. Whether this can actually make you "smarter" is up for debate, but experts claim that playing tabletop games at any age can boost certain portions of the brain, improve social skills and help stave off mental deterioration in seniors.

While simple so-called "brain training" games, such as crosswords and Sudoku, have long been recognised as a good way for people to stay mentally active, tabletop games can also hone specific mental capabilities. Quick-to-learn games such as Ticket to Ride may offer greater brain benefits than a crossword puzzle, as tabletop titles include an interactive social element. Growing scientific evidence even points to the benefits of tabletop games in reducing the risk of Alzheimer's disease in seniors.



Even after 80 years, Monopoly is still a family favourite

IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK



Members of the tabletop community, including our experts, have also noticed social advantages. Shared interest in cooperative games can create a safe environment for people who may be shy or lacking in self-confidence, and such an environment can help them refine their social skills.

Keith Done is another industry expert who's been into tabletop games since the 1960s, thanks in part to developing asthma at a young age at a time when drugs like Ventolin weren't readily available. This led to long periods spent indoors, so he gravitated towards tabletop gaming. Now he's heavily involved with the League of Extraordinary Gamers (LXG), which boasts the largest collection of games in the Brisbane area – more than 300.

While running LXG, Done has found that players with mental or physical disabilities can benefit from playing board games. LXG has worked with care groups in and around Brisbane, including Youngcare, an organisation aimed at supporting people under 65 who require full-time care. Youngcare takes the position that such people deserve the same experiences as young people without disabilities, which prompted Done to get in touch about sharing LXG's passion for tabletop.

"We started running a night for people with multiple sclerosis [MS] with Youngcare, and the organisers love it," Done explains. "They said that if you have MS or other disabilities, playing games is a great release for people's minds. There are a couple of people who have different levels of brain damage but they can play games quite well, and some can't roll dice or hold cards but we can do that for them."

"One of the really important features of tabletop gaming is that it's face-to-face"

Some may see disabilities as potentially limiting, but they can give some special-needs gamers a wonderful competitive edge. "There's a guy there who has to hear a concept a few times before it sinks in, but then he comes out with these long-term memory things that blow other players away," says Done.

Computer vs tabletop

Tabletop games may be gaining traction as therapeutic tools among the community, but they didn't reach that point overnight. In fact, there was a time when the pastime almost ceased to exist. Done remembers when it started to fall off the radar in the 1980s; consumer computers were rolling out and taking attention away from the tabletop. "I knew a guy who was a core board gamer and he moved into the computer world in the '80s, arguing people wouldn't be playing board games anymore, that this would replace everything," says Done.

The scene was kept alive by dedicated enthusiasts until the early 1990s, when new and innovative games began to appear. "It's really because of the wave of Euro games that appeared then," Done explains. "Before that, many games were mainly war games that were coming principally out of America. [Europeans] were bringing in all these [games] like Settlers of Catan and Powergrid – topics people hadn't put into games before."

Such games encouraged new playing mechanics – interaction, cooperation and even collaboration. Many put a different spin on trying to defeat the competition by allowing everyone to finish the game without being eliminated, while one player stands as the victor. Others even brought players together against the game itself. Slowly but surely, people were noticing the growing variety in the tabletop scene, and gamers who weren't really into goblins and guns were finding titles that appealed to their interests.

Even longtime players like Melissa Rogerson were, and still are, excited by the wider variety. She's been a fan of tabletop games since she was 10 years old and, like her parents did, has introduced her two children to the hobby. Today, she's the co-chair of Boardgames Australia, and also tabletop manager at this year's PAX Australia convention (to be held in Melbourne, 31 Oct-2 Nov).

"I remember one lady, who wasn't a gamer, telling me she'd done a favour for

a game store owner," says Rogerson. "As a thank you, he told her she could pick any game from his store that she wanted. She was absolutely thrilled because she loved horses, and sure enough she found a game about horses there. It didn't matter that it was kind of a rubbish game by gamer standards; for her it was the perfect game because it was about her passion."

As Houlihan, Rogerson and Done have overseen tabletop clubs, conventions and competitions in their respective cities, they have all noticed a trend. People aren't just trying games and moving on – they're coming back for more. They've taken tabletop gaming from a passing interest into a full-blown hobby, either through clubs or at home with friends.

"To me, one of the really important features of tabletop gaming is that it's face-to-face," Rogerson explains. "It's all about sitting there facing somebody which, in turn, brings a slightly different set of behaviours than some kinds of online gaming. It's a very social experience."

That's not to say video games can't be a social experience. But multiplayer video gaming is, to a degree, an isolated activity. Even if you're playing a split-screen game in the same room as your friends, you still devote your attention to the screen, while online multiplayer eliminates the physical presence entirely. "That's why people enjoy board games – they're in the thick of the socialising action," Houlihan argues. "I think that's something that's sometimes lost in computer gaming."

Then there's the creative investment. Even though you have a board and pieces in front of you, much of the game relies on the player's imagination, as they picture themselves commanding an army on a desolate wasteland armed with only a pencil and piece of paper in hand. In the same way people read books rather than watch TV, the tabletop gives you a degree of creative control that can make a game much more immersive and rewarding.

Hand-painted miniature figures play a big part in strategy games such as Warhammer

CHOICE verdict

At its core, tabletop gaming is about enjoying the game, no matter who's playing or how old they are. In Houlihan's experience, most tabletop fans are aged 40-50, whereas the core group at LXG are in their early to late 20s. More often than not, these groups will converge. "One of the more pleasant experiences I had at GenCon was seeing a group playing D&D," he explains. "There was a 12-year-old and a 77-year-old and they were connecting. [The 12-year-old] was basically letting the older man thrust the sword into the goblin while supporting him with a magic missile! It's something you'd never see anywhere else." ■

BRIDGING THE GAPS

When you walk into a club like LXG or even the tabletop area at a gaming conference, you'll usually find an open community that's always looking for more players. They don't just want to entice people, they want to keep them there – and the shared love of tabletop gaming has helped bridge gaps between age, race and gender.

The reason behind it is pretty simple. "If I want to play a game, I need someone to play a game with," says Rogerson. "The more people I know who enjoy playing games, the more likely it is that I'll be able to find someone I can play a game with." It's why signs reading "Learn to play," and "For first timers" are commonly seen at tabletop events, as enthusiastic players volunteer their time to bring new people into the fold.

More women are getting involved in tabletop too, perhaps due to the variety of themes and mechanics. "When I started at my first convention in 1983, maybe five per cent of the crowd were women," Houlihan says. "These days it's much closer to, or possibly even more than half."

Card game Magic: The Gathering has 12 million players worldwide

IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK

Ask the Experts

Got a niggling question our team can help with?

Q I have eight solar panels and a smart meter. I can't work out whether it's more economical to run my washing machine and dishwasher at night (off-peak electricity rate is 13 cents per kWh) or during the day (charges vary from peak at 52.5c/kWh and shoulder at 21.8c /kWh) when, presumably, the solar panels are working. I get 5.1c /kWh for my "voluntary feed-in tariff". Can you please clarify?

A Damien Moyse of the Alternative Technology Association: Given the solar is there, and as long as it's using the solar electricity that would otherwise be exported to the grid for only 5.1 cents, I'd suggest running your washing machine and dishwasher during solar generation time.

Q My husband and I are both on a pension. We've had health insurance forever and now find it a trial paying the monthly amount. We are thinking of just having extras and cancelling hospital. Will we be penalised in any way by doing this?

A CHOICE finance specialist Jodi Bird: If you don't have hospital insurance and your combined income is more than $180,000, you will incur the Medicare Levy Surcharge (although given you're on a pension, this seems unlikely). Depending on your circumstances, it's possible that if you drop hospital insurance now and choose to take it up again later you may have to pay the Lifetime Health Cover loading on your premium (if you don't take up private hospital again, then there's no loading to pay). This adds two per cent to your hospital cover premium for every year you don't have hospital insurance on the later date out of 1 July following your 31st birthday or 1 July 2000.

For our latest health insurance reports, see *CHOICE*, Jun and Jul 14.

Ask us!

Do you have a question for one of CHOICE's experts? Email us at **asktheexperts@choice.com.au** or write to us at:
Ask the Experts, CHOICE,
57 Carrington Rd, Marrickville,
NSW 2204.
We regret that we cannot reply to all correspondence.

Q In your online fridge reviews (choice.com.au/fridges), you provide noise levels for all the fridges you test. One model has a very high score, with a noise level at 30dB, while another comes in at 28dB. Am I likely to notice the difference between 28dB and 30dB?

A CHOICE whitegoods expert Matthew Steen: The human ear doesn't actually register a difference of 3dB or less between measurements. So one fridge at 28dB won't sound any different to another fridge at 30dB. If the fridge were at 31dB, however, you would notice a very slight increase in noise level, although you would have to listen hard for it – it's more noticeable in an ideal listening environment with no other noises around. ■

COMPILED BY SIOBAHN DONOHOE. IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK

Tests

Everything to help you choose a new vacuum, plus wine fridges, tents and more

42 Washer/dryers
They'll save you space, but what about time and money?

47 Vacs buying guide
Traditional, stick or robot – we've got the answers

51 Vacuum cleaners
See which models suck most in our new quick-clean test

54 Wine fridges
Store your top drops properly with our top picks

59 NextG phones
From sleek new smartphones to affordable basics

65 Pressure cookers
Not explosive, not instant - we bust some myths

68 Four-person tents
Fun for the whole family?

71 Dehumidifiers
Dynamite drying or a damp squib? Read our verdict

We've got the best four-person tents well and truly pegged – see page 68 for more

CHOICE's Matthew Steen conducts some in-tents testing

CHOICE

CHOICE'S experienced technical staff puts products through their paces in our own testing laboratories. We use test methods based on Australian standards and develop our own to match the way consumers use a product in their homes. We buy the products we test, maintaining our independence from manufacturers and so we know what you're faced with in the shops. We've checked the models are available at the time we publish. Our recommendations are based on a product's quality and performance, with no hidden bias.

CHOICE Shopper
Members who have subscribed to CHOICE through our website have access to the best deals on products wherever this logo appears. Simply have your CHOICE membership number on hand, the model name and number, and the price you have been quoted. Phone 1300 360 655 and we'll source you the best deal.

CHOICE Online
For more related information and articles on this topic, go to **choice.com.au**

CHOICE Best Buy
Our testers award a product a Best Buy if it delivers high quality at a comparatively low price. Not every test report includes Best Buys.

CHOICE Green Buy
Our researchers award a Green Buy to a product that delivers good quality and environmental performance. Not every test report includes Green Buys.

A timely issue

You can save space with a two-in-one washer/dryer, but it won't save you time, **Matthew Steen** finds

A washer/dryer is the ultimate laundry combo machine – put a load of washing in and take it out dry. If only it all came out ironed too, it would be perfect. But what are the downsides to using this marvel?

Pros

- Washing and drying performance of washer/dryers roughly match separate washers and condenser dryers.
- You can use either the wash function or the dryer function separately – they don't have to be combined.
- The drying capacity is limited, but roughly matches what we find most people use in their normal washers.
- Purchase and running costs are roughly equivalent to owning a separate front-load washer and condenser dryer.

Cons

- The dryer component can only dry about half the capacity of the washer.
- A combined wash and dry cycle can take from three hours to over six.
- The dryer mechanism uses condenser technology, which uses more water after the wash cycle to dry the clothes. It can range from as little as 19L to as much as 58L – this has improved from our last test in 2005.
- Some combo machines are big – the 10kg Samsung is 99cm tall so won't fit under the standard bench height.

Nutshell

- Six washer/dryer combo machines tested, four of which are recommended.
- Combined costs are marginal, but cycle time is way too long.

Changes since our last test

- In 2005 there was no requirement for manufacturers to state the water usage for the drying cycle. This is now labelled alongside star ratings for energy.
- We've moved to a 3.5kg load for the washer/dryer combination, and will use this in future dryer testing to align with how Aussies tend to fill their washers.

Who are washer/dryer combos suitable for?

- Small homes where you can't fit both a washer and dryer
- Holiday house where you aren't time poor
- Those living in an environment where you rarely use the dryer function

WILL NOT DRY!

Dryers should dry their load to at least six per cent moisture content to be considered "dry" according to the relevant Australian standard. But one tested model, the Miele, only reached nine per cent dryness after we tested it to beyond its claimed capacity. The Miele only claims a 2.5kg drying capacity and so it struggled to dry 3.5kg, which is what we consider to be the average load used by Australians in their washers.

We think it's impractical to ask consumers to take out portions of their load in order to dry it. However, if you're willing to let the wash process end, take out and reduce the resulting wet load to what you guess a 2.5kg load would be, and then put it back in, the Miele will dry OK and meet the six per cent standard. It's worth noting that even if you buy this machine, you can just trigger it to do another drying run to finish the drying to a better standard, although this will raise the energy and water usage.

All other machines we tested can dry what we consider to be the average load size with no hassles.

How we test

How do we choose the program we run to test the machine?

CHOICE uses a set of testing criteria that generally involves a normal, cold wash. When this doesn't exist on a machine, we use the closest approximation to a normal, cold wash. Because of this, you'll sometimes see differences between what the energy and water labels say on the machine and our results. This is because manufacturers try to get as good an energy and water label as possible, because the more stars they have, the better the chance you'll buy their product. This also often means the program the manufacturer selects is not what you'll choose at home.

How do we test washer/dryer machines?

Using a normal cold-water wash cycle, we test each machine to see how it shifts tough stains from specially prepared cloths that have been attached to a standard wash-set of linen. After the wash cycle has finished, the testers use a special machine to examine each cloth to see how much light is reflected from each stain, which allows them to calculate how much dirt has been removed. This machine is more sensitive than the human eye: differences of six per cent or more in the dirt removal scores are visible.

We then run a drying cycle using the same load size for washing and measure how much energy drying the load takes, and how long it takes to dry the clothes.

Water-free drying?

We're currently testing the Bosch washer/dryer, which claims to use no water to dry. We'll be publishing the results for this machine as soon as they're ready, but so far we've noticed it drawing almost three litres in its cooling period. So while apparently not meeting its no-water claim, it's still less than all the other machines tested here.

IMAGES: SHUTTERSTOCK

WHAT TO BUY

CHOICE recommends washer dryers that score at least 70% overall, for 75% wash performance and 55% for drying performance. We don't recommend any products with less than 55% in any major score.

Regular Capacity

73%
LG WD14130FD6 (8.5KG / 4.5KG)

Good points

- Very good water efficiency, rinse effectiveness and spin efficiency
- Favourites program
- Woollens wash, machine only

Bad points

- No gentle/delicates program

72%
Samsung WD856UHSAWQ (8.5KG / 6.0KG)

Good points

- Excellent rinse effectiveness
- Favourites program
- Woollens wash, machine only

Bad points

- Relatively high water usage during drying

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Woollens cycle (machine-/handwashable) programs relate to the instructions on the garment itself, advising whether it's machine-washable or for handwash only. Washers with a tick for handwash say this program is gentle enough for handwash-only items.

Out-of-balance correction automatically detects and redistributes an out-of-balance load, either by spinning slowly before the full spin cycle or taking in more water (which is what most top-loaders do). If you're concerned about high water usage, opt for a machine without this feature or buy a front-loader, which is less likely to go out of balance.

Selectable spin speed allows you to change the spin speed on some programs. A higher spin speed will result in drier clothes (good when using a dryer), while a lower speed is for delicates or fabrics that crease easily.

Auto-sensing water level automatically adjusts the water level according to the load and/or fabric type. Some machines also adjust the washing action.

Extra rinse can be useful for people sensitive to detergents, because it adds an extra rinse stage to the washing program.

Tap connection If you only have a cold water tap in your laundry, choosing a front-loader means you can still wash in warm or hot water when needed, as the machine will heat the water. If you want to take advantage of less expensive hot water systems, such as solar, look for a machine connected to hot and cold water. Be aware, however, that most front-loaders with a hot and cold connection only draw hot water when the wash temperature is set to 60°C.

	COSTS		PERFORMANCE			
	Price ($)	Running costs ($/10 years)	Overall score (%)	Wash performance (%)	Drying performance (%)	Overall water used (wash & dry, L)
REGULAR CAPACITY						
LG WD14130FD6	2039	1907	73	80	55	82
Miele WT2780WPM	3599	1280	72	80	53	64
Samsung WD856UHSAWQ	1899	1963	72	78	59	112
Electrolux EWW12832	1639	1835	71	78	55	75
LG WD1402CRD6	1499	2149	67	80	38	85
Samsung WD10F7S7SRP	2899	1910	65	70	53	115
SMALL CAPACITY						
Miele WT2780WPM	3599	1280	72	80	53	64

About the rest

The **LG WD1402CRD6** has a poor drying time. It and the **Samsung WD10F7S7SRP** are both OK overall and you may be quite happy with their performance, if not their total time when using them in a combination run.

71%
Electrolux EWW12832 (8.0KG / 5.0KG)

Good points

- Very good water efficiency
- Very good rinse effectiveness
- Woollens wash, machine only

Bad points

- Highest combination wash and dry running time of the recommended models

Small Capacity

76%
Miele WT2780WPM (5.5KG / 2.5KG)

Good points

- Very good water efficiency, rinse effectiveness and spin efficiency
- Woollens wash, including handwashables

Bad points

- None to mention

			BRAND		FEATURES						SPECIFICATIONS						
Cycle time wash / dry (min)	Cycle time combo (min)	Noise (dB)	Brand reliability (%)	Brand loyalty (%)	Gentle or delicates program	Out-of-balance correction	Handwash-only woollens	Auto-sensing water level	Extra rinse	Dryer controls (sensor or timer)	Tap connection	Warranty (yrs)	Country of manufacture	Coldest wash temperature for normal wash (°C)*	Capacity wash/ dry (kg)	Claimed dimensions (cm, H x W x D)	Contact
122 / 195	266	63	84	89		✓		✓	✓	Both	H & C	2	S Korea	Cold	8.5 / 4.5	85 x 60 x 64	lg.com.au
113 / 112	222	62	92	96	✓	ns	✓	✓	✓	Both	C	1	Germany	Cold	5.5 / 2.5	85 x 60 x 58	miele.com.au
121 / 180	259	64	82	94	✓	ns	ns	✓	✓	Both	H & C	3	China	Cold	8.5 / 6.0	85 x 60 x 65	samsung.com.au
103 / 188	298	62	86	88	✓	✓		✓	✓	Both	C	2	Thailand	Cold	8.0 / 5.0	85 x 60 x 67	electrolux.com.au
111 / 302	403	62	84	89		✓		✓		Both	H & C	2	S Korea	Cold	7.5 / 4.0	85 x 60 x 55	lg.com.au
68 / 204	261	51	82	94		ns		✓	✓	Both	H & C	2	S Korea	Cold	10.0 / 7.0	99 x 69 x 82	samsung.com.au
113 / 112	222	62	92	96	✓	ns	✓	✓	✓	Both	C	1	Germany	Cold	5.5 / 2.5	85 x 60 x 58	miele.com.au

USING THE TABLE **Price** Recommended or average retail, as of July 2014. **Scores** The overall score is made up of washing performance (70%) and drying performance (30%). **Dirt removal** More accurate than the human eye, a spectrophotometer is used to measure this – differences of about 6% are visible. **Features** See What to Look For, opposite, for details. **Tap connection** Some machines need both hot and cold water to operate. Others connect to cold water only and may need a special connector or sealing cap for the hot water inlet. A machine with a heater can be particularly useful if you connect to cold only, as it still gives you the option of a warm or hot wash. But a dual-connection front-loader connected to solar hot water can be more efficient when doing warm or hot washes. **Dimensions** are for the smallest box that fits around the machine, as stated by the manufacturer. **Running costs** This is an estimate of how much it will cost for water and electricity over 10 years if you wash the equivalent of one load every day using a normal cycle and a drying cycle three times a week, based on 26c/kWh of electricity and $2 per 1000L for water. Some machines still draw power when the machine is connected to a power source but not in use, so switch off the machine at the power point when not in use. The running costs don't include detergent, which is the largest ongoing cost of running a washing machine. **Brand reliability and loyalty** scores, where we have statistics, are taken straight from our brand reliability survey (see *CHOICE*, Apr 14), but do not add to the overall score. The scores only relate to washers. These scores refer to the brand only, not that particular model. Differences of 3% or more between brands are significant. All machines on test have both sensor and timer dryer controls, and all were tested on a cold wash. **TABLE NOTES (A)** We penalised the Miele for not being able to properly dry a 3.5kg load. We tested it above its claimed capacity because this is what we find consumers load on average into their machines. * Cold = cold tap water (20°C). **ns** Not stated. **nt** Not tested.

What we measure

WASHING CYCLE

Rinse performance This is a measure of how well the machines keep the dirt suspended in the water rather than depositing it back on the clothes, and how well they rinse out the detergent – our testers add a marker chemical to the wash. At the end, they take a sample of the water remaining in the clothes to determine the amount of chemical that's left – the less there is, the better the rinse.

Water efficiency Water flow meters are connected to each machine to measure water use. To compare efficiency between different-sized machines, we calculate the amount of water used per kilogram of the test load of washing. The lower the water consumption per kilogram of clothing, the higher the efficiency score.

Spin efficiency The test load is weighed before and after each wash. The higher the score, the more water is removed, which means the washing takes less time (and energy, if you use a dryer) to dry. We use the maximum spin speed (some machines let you vary the speed).

Gentleness To check for fabric wear, we attach swatches of easily frayed fabric to the garments in each load. The area of the swatch is measured before and after the wash – the less fraying, the gentler the machine is assessed to be and the higher the score it's given.

Noise levels The maximum noise level is recorded during the spin cycle and is measured one metre away from the machine and one metre above the ground. Typically, the noise level of these machines is similar to that of a normal conversation (about 65dB). It's not an absolute noise measurement – the acoustics of your home will determine exactly how a machine sounds in use – but it's a good comparative measure.

Energy efficiency According to 2008 data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics, 74% of Australians use cold water in their washing machines, and CHOICE's own 2013 survey similarly found 54% of members use a cold-wash program in their homes. So we test with cold water to best reflect consumer habits.

Our surveys have found the majority of members use cold water – so we test with cold water to best reflect your habits

A major effect of washing in cold water is that the machines use a lot less energy, as they don't have to heat the water (or your hot water system doesn't have to do it for them). So energy efficiency is no longer considered in the overall score.

Running costs are an estimate of how much it will cost you over 10 years for water and electricity based on a daily wash cycle and thrice-weekly drying

DRYING CYCLE

Energy efficiency We put a 3.5kg wet load of washing into the clothes dryer and measure how long it takes to dry and how much energy is used. The energy efficiency and drying time scores are based on the amount of energy and time used per kilogram of clothing.

We then dry the clothes until they're bone dry, and then saturate and spin them dry in a washing machine. Following this, water is sprayed evenly throughout the load while the weight is measured until the moisture content reaches 90%. The load is then placed in the clothes dryer to assess its drying performance and energy efficiency.

Drying time If the clothes dryer has a sensor to determine when the clothes are dry and automatically turns off, we use it, otherwise we test using the timer.

Ease of use We also assess the labelling and intuitiveness of the controls and how easy the filter, if any, is to access and clean.

WHAT ABOUT THE RUNNING COSTS?

This is an estimate of how much it will cost you over 10 years (the average life of a washer dryer) for water and electricity, if you wash one load every day using a normal cycle and drying a full load about three times a week (150 times a year) for 10 years. The calculations are based on 26c per kWh for electricity and $2 per 1000L for water. For simplicity, we've excluded depreciation, interest costs (if you borrow to buy the machine), and the cost of detergent – people use different amounts and the price varies considerably between brands. ■

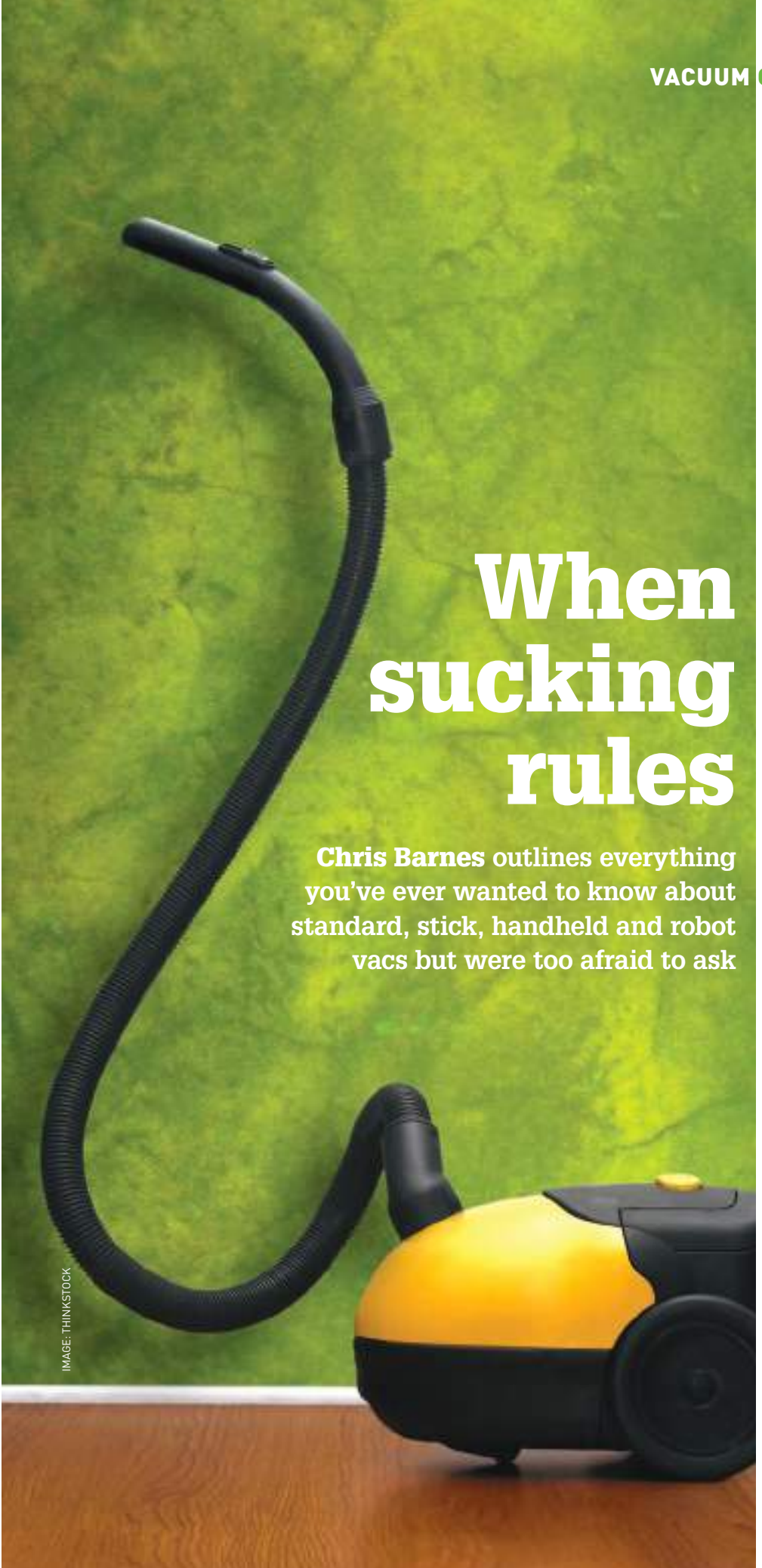


IMAGE: THINKSTOCK

When sucking rules

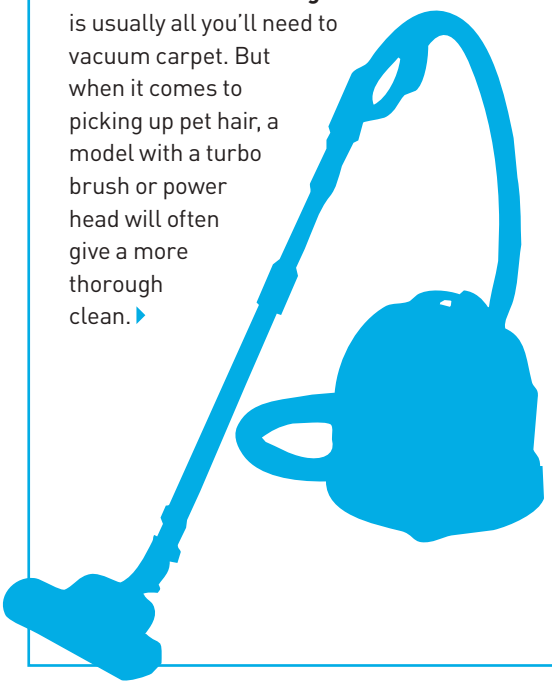
Chris Barnes outlines everything you've ever wanted to know about standard, stick, handheld and robot vacs but were too afraid to ask

When shopping for a new vacuum cleaner, it can be hard to know what you're actually paying for, let alone what you should be spending, with price points ranging from under $100 to more than $1500. Mid-priced vacs usually offer the best combination of performance and value, although it's some of the more expensive models, loaded up with the latest and most powerful technology, that give the very best carpet cleaning. Some low-cost vacuums compare favourably with pricier models, but generally the cheaper models are more suited to cleaning hard floors than carpet.

Barrel/uprights

When buying a vacuum cleaner, keep in mind the type of cleaning that's required.

- **Barrel models** are easier to carry up stairs and use in awkward places, such as in a car or behind furniture.
- **Upright models** suit large areas of carpet cleaning, on a level surface, as they have built-in power heads.
- A **conventional cleaning head** is usually all you'll need to vacuum carpet. But when it comes to picking up pet hair, a model with a turbo brush or power head will often give a more thorough clean.



Barrel/uprights (cont'd)

BAG OR BIN?

Vacuums have either a bin or a bag to collect the dust, and both systems have their pros and cons. Bins and reusable cloth bags are messier and harder to empty, while paper bags are more user-friendly but have ongoing costs and may be something you often forget to buy.

You also need to consider the costs of bags on the environment. In our testing, we now include the price of each bag where applicable and also make note of the company's policy of bag disposal.

Bags

- They tend to be less messy to empty. Bags generally come with sliding shutters to prevent dust from spilling out when removed.
- With a bagged vacuum you can just put the full bag into the rubbish bin, rather than risk letting dust and allergens back into the air as you tip the vacuum bin into the rubbish. This could make a bagged model a better choice in an apartment, or when you don't have a garden.
- Bags aren't necessarily recyclable, but are usually biodegradable. If the bags are completely biodegradable, you can put them in your compost.
- When you change the disposable bag, you're also changing and refreshing a large part of the filter system. However, the other filters still need replacing from time to time.
- A disposable bag is generally larger than a bin, so doesn't need to be emptied as frequently.
- This type of vacuum does involve an ongoing cost as you'll need to buy bags from time to time, and it can be inconvenient if you run out.

Bins

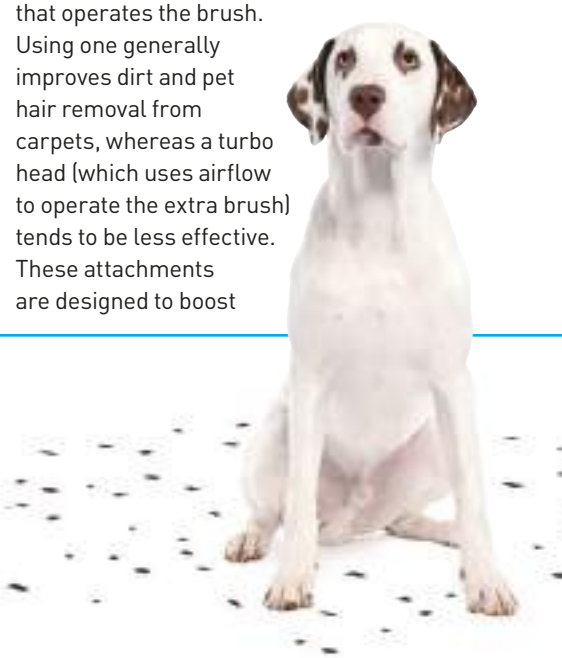
- It's easier to see and retrieve an item that's been accidentally sucked up.
- Disposing of the waste from a bin can release dust and allergens back into the area. But if you have an outside area, this is less of an issue – you can even dump it straight into the garden or compost, if the dust doesn't have too many synthetic nasties.
- With most bin models you'll need to either clean the main filter frequently, or replace it – a hidden extra cost.
- Make sure you replace filters when necessary, otherwise the vacuum's performance could deteriorate.
- Bin models generally involve fewer ongoing costs as you don't need to keep buying bags.

FEATURES

Check out this list to decide which features or functions are must-haves for your new vacuum.

Power head or turbo head?

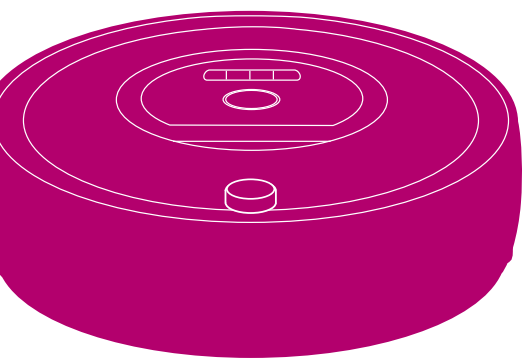
A power head replaces the standard cleaning head and has an inbuilt motor that operates the brush. Using one generally improves dirt and pet hair removal from carpets, whereas a turbo head (which uses airflow to operate the extra brush) tends to be less effective. These attachments are designed to boost



Robot vacs

Few cleaning products have sparked as much interest recently as the robot vacuum. After all, it is the dream of any time-poor person to be able to sit down and relax while an artificially intelligent device cleans the house.

Robot vacs have become very popular in the past few years, and many people swear by them. Some owners even name their robots or dress them up in custom coverings. They're easy to use, and the novelty appeal is undeniable – but are they good enough to replace your regular barrel or bag vac?



HOW MUCH DO THEY SUCK?

Despite sophisticated technology – navigation software, stair detection, cameras to detect dirt – robot vacuum cleaners are still comparatively poor at that most common job: removing dirt from carpet. They simply can't generate the suction of a standard vacuum. They can leave the carpet *looking* clean, but below the surface a lot of dirt is left behind. This means that for most homes, we can't recommend any robot vacuum as a replacement for your trusty drag-around model.

In our tests, we've found they can pick up a reasonable amount of fluff (such as pet hair) along with some dirt, but also seem to push the remaining dirt even deeper into the carpet pile. Most people have no way of measuring the amount of dirt that's actually in their carpet, so when you see the fluff and dirt in the robot's bin, and the superficially clean carpet, it looks as though the robot vacuum cleaner has done a much better job than is actually the case.

cleaning performance but tend to make vacuums bulkier and/or heavier so they may not be as easy to use or manoeuvre.

Tools Tools such as a **crevice nozzle** (for narrow corners and around chair cushions), an **upholstery brush** (for curtains and soft furnishings) and a **dusting brush** can be very handy. Check whether these tools are supplied with the vacuum cleaner or if they're optional extras.

Telescopic wand This lets you adjust the wand to suit your height, so you can vacuum without bending your back too much. If you're tall, try testing the model in-store to ensure it's long enough for you.

Adjustable head height This feature is useful if you have carpets with different pile heights, and also for wooden or tiled floors.

Variable suction/power A control on the wand allows you to vary the suction for more delicate jobs, such as cleaning curtains.

Dustbag-full indicator This feature lets you know when the dust collector is full without you having to open the vacuum.

Blower A vacuum that can reverse the airflow to blow air continuously is a godsend when it's time to blow up an airbed!

On-board storage for accessories Handy when you're cleaning edges and upholstery, and/or dusting furniture while vacuuming.

Wand storage allows the wand to be attached neatly to the cleaner when storing. This is useful for keeping all the bits together.

Retractable cord This is much easier than winding up the cord manually! Uprights don't have this feature, but you can wind the cord around two hooks to keep it tidy.

HEPA filter This stands for high-efficiency particulate air filtration. It's an international standard for filters that trap minute particles. This filter can help if you have asthma or a dust allergy or sensitivity, but you have to clean or replace it regularly (about once a year) to ensure it works efficiently – which may mean more ongoing costs. Vacuums with a HEPA filter are usually more expensive. If you have asthma, a dust allergy or are simply sensitive to dust, it can help, although for asthma sufferers it's unlikely to be the complete answer to house dirt.

BUT I DON'T HAVE (MUCH) CARPET!

Then your house-cleaning regime might be more future-friendly. Most robot vacs we've tested are excellent at cleaning hard floors – albeit not always in the corners and edges – and pet-hair pickup looks to be (slowly) improving, too.

For a house with mostly hard floors, most of the tested robot vacuum cleaners will do a reasonable job of keeping your floors clean when run on a daily basis, although a more thorough cleaning with a standard vacuum (or a broom) will still occasionally be needed. In a home with carpeted floors, a robot vac is fine for a purely cosmetic tidy-up, but the carpet will need a regular going-over with a standard vac.

FEATURES

Stair detection This feature, now standard across almost all models, helps the robot sense when it has reached a ledge or step so it can back off and avoid a damaging tumble.

Virtual wall An accessory used to create an invisible barrier, for blocking off open doorways or other areas you don't want the robot to enter.

Programmable times This handy function allows you to set times of the day or week to run the robot – for instance, you could set it to run only while you're away at work.

Charging When the battery charge is low, the robot finds its way back to the charger and docks automatically. All the models we tested do this.

Noise The robots are generally quieter than standard vacs, but some have an annoying high-pitched whistle while others make a mechanical grinding noise. This may be less important if the robot mainly runs while you're out of the house, but these two sounds may annoy neighbours or pets.

Remote control Most models come with a remote to direct the vacuum around the room. But if you're going to be there to direct the robot around the room, wouldn't it be better for you to get up off the couch and clean with a normal vacuum cleaner? ▸

Some owners even name their robots or dress them up in custom coverings!

IMAGES: THINKSTOCK & SHUTTERSTOCK

Stick/handheld

Stick vacuum cleaners are useful around the kitchen and other areas of the home where you have an annoying spill and don't want to have to fish out the dustpan and brush. Easily hidden away in a cupboard, they take up less room than a full-sized vacuum cleaner – and most can be split into two devices, with a handheld vacuum being a part of the stick vacuum.

You can also buy a handheld vacuum on its own to keep handy for small spills, or for cleaning your car, handbag or even computer keyboards. Some people refer to these as "dust-busters", after the brand name, although a number of companies make them.

Stick vacs aren't expected to perform as well at cleaning carpets as a standard vacuum cleaner

POWER IN NUMBERS

When it comes to vacuum cleaners, power is no guarantee of performance for floor models – it's the overall design of the cleaner that makes the difference. (Stick vacs aren't expected to perform as well at cleaning carpets as a standard vacuum cleaner, at any rate.) But for handheld models, as for most cordless appliances, the more juice in the battery, the better the performance is likely to be. New designs, and technology such as lithium-ion batteries, have led to improved dirt pick-up and running times. As with most battery-operated appliances, handheld vacs generally lose power as their battery charge runs down.

FEATURES

Charging & running time Look for models that run for a useful length of time and don't take too long to charge. Some may need to charge overnight, or longer.

Light, quiet & easy to manoeuvre Try out the vacuum in the shop to see if it's all these things. For stick models, check that it moves easily over both carpet and hard surfaces.

Filter This should be easy to remove and clean or replace.

Tools The standard items to check for are a dusting brush and crevice tools. Other items might include squeegee tools, an extension tube or a pet hairbrush. Tools are especially useful if inbuilt or stored on the vac itself, rather than separately or on the charging cradle.

2-in-1 models These can be used as either a stick or a handheld vacuum. They usually have a trigger to release the handheld vacuum located on the torso of the stick.

Variable power/suction This allows you to lower the suction, which is handy when cleaning fabric items such as curtains or upholstery.

Battery Nickel-metal hydride (NiMH) and lithium-ion (Li-ion) batteries are generally more environmentally friendly than nickel-cadmium (NiCd) and lead-acid batteries. We have found models with higher voltage batteries – 18V and up – tend to perform better.

Switch An on/off switch is easier for continuous operation than a trigger that needs to be held down.

Fallout flap This prevents dirt falling back out of the vacuum when you carry it with the nozzle facing downwards, such as when moving between cleaning tasks.

Wall-mountable charging base A handy mounted base will help to keep the vac readily accessible and fully charged.

Wet & dry Some models can suck up wet material or liquids. However, they can usually only take a fairly small amount (about 150mL) and you shouldn't fill the bin with liquid past the indicated maximum level. The bin and filter need to be cleaned and dried separately afterwards. ■

Fancy a quickie?

Chris Barnes checks out which vacs are best for quick carpet cleaning

Nutshell

- Nine new vacuum cleaners tested, including six upright and three barrel models.
- We've added a new test to see which models perform best when you're just doing a quick clean of the carpet.

More than half of all vacuum cleaners in Australia are barrel or canister types (which you pull along behind you). Stick and handheld models are popular too; robots, while currently only a small part of the market, are rising fast in numbers. The upright vacuum has also enjoyed a resurgence in popularity lately, so we've included six more in our latest test, along with three new barrel models. See our buying guide on page 47 for the pros and cons of each type of vacuum.

Unfortunately, no newly tested upright model performed well enough to be recommended, though one barrel model did – see page 52.

The new "quick clean" test measures dirt pick-up after just four passes of the cleaning head

We've introduced a new component to our vacuum cleaner testing. Our usual test involves 10 passes up and down the carpet – very thorough, but more than most people would usually do. The new "quick clean" test measures dirt pick-up from carpet after just four passes of the cleaning head. Naturally, the results in this test are lower than for the full carpet one, but they're a useful guide to which vacs might suit you if you usually just do a quick vacuum. We haven't included it in the overall score, as we don't have these results for previously tested models, but it will become part of the overall score in future.

The Nilfisk, Vax Air VAU1200, Shark, Electrolux Ultra Silencer Green ZUSG4061 and Dyson DC25 Origin proved to be the best of the newly tested models for quick cleaning. All picked up even more dirt after the full 10 passes, particularly the Shark. The table lists all the currently available models we've tested that score at least 75% overall, plus all other newly tested models.

IMAGE: THINKSTOCK

WHAT TO BUY

82%
Nilfisk Elite Comfort 107402946

Good points

- Good at picking up dirt from carpet and cleaning corners and along edges
- Excellent at picking up pet hair
- Telescopic wand
- Variable power
- Good range of tools with on-board storage for all of them
- HEPA filter
- Very long power cord
- Excellent controls located at fingertip

Bad points

- None to mention

ABOUT THE REST

Of the other newly tested models, the **Vax, Shark, Electrolux , Volta** and **Dyson DC25 Origin** are good overall and score well for dirt pick-up from carpet (particularly the Shark) but fall down in other areas, such as ease of use or cleaning corners and edges. The **Samsung**, **Bissell** and **Piranha** are let down by their dirt pick-up from carpet. However, at only $89 the Piranha is a decent option for homes with mostly hard floors.

For details of how we test vacuums, visit **choice.com.au/vacuumcleaners**

PREVIOUSLY RECOMMENDED

88% Sebo Airbelt K3 Premium (Feb 12) $1099
84% Miele S6210 Compact (Apr 14) $349
83% Miele S8 Cat & Dog S8320 (Nov 13) $699
82% Miele S8310 (Apr 14) $499
82% Miele S8790 HEPA Silence (Jul 13) $899
82% Sauber Intelligence SI-200 (Mar 13) $1599
82% Sebo Felix Premium (Oct 12) $999
81% Bosch Free'e Animal BSGL5244AU (Oct 12) $549

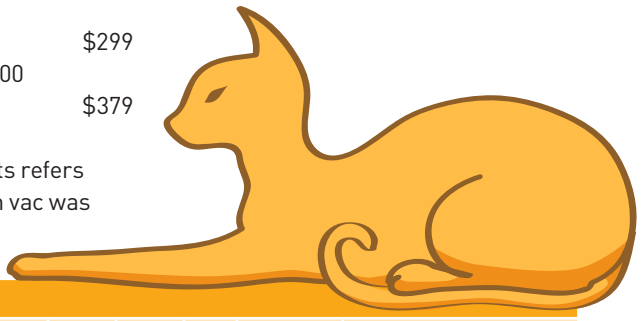
				PERFORMANCE			
	Price ($)	Annual running costs ($)	Cost per bag ($)*	Overall score	Dirt removal from carpet score (%)	Quick cleaning on carpet score (%)	Ease of use score (%)
Sebo Airbelt K3 Premium	1099	21.63	4.13	88	92	nt	82
Miele S6210 Compact	349	23.90	4.50	84	78	nt	82
Miele S8 Cat & Dog S8320	699	24.10	3.60	83	79	nt	81
Miele S8310	499	26.60	3.60	82	76	nt	79
Miele S8790 HEPA Silence	899	18.00	3.60	82	75	nt	82
• **Nilfisk** Elite Comfort 107402946	569	22.60	8.25	82	75	63	84
Sauber Intelligence SI-200	1599	17.00	4.25	82	78	nt	80
Sebo Felix Premium	999	13.47	3.00	82	90	nt	66
Bosch Free'e Animal BSGL5244AU	549	27.06	4.25	81	74	nt	82
Miele Compact Cat & Dog S6320	499	23.64	5.50	81	74	nt	79
Electrolux Ultra Captic ZUC4103DEL	899	17.20	na	80	74	nt	79
Electrolux Ultra Silencer Animal Care ZUS4065PET	449	17.60	4.25	80	75	nt	82
Miele S2111	299	19.74	4.99	80	76	nt	80
Vax Zen 2 Pet VCZP1600	379	19.74	na	80	72	nt	81
Electrolux Ultra Silencer ZUS4065OR	399	17.40	2.50	79	77	nt	78
Miele S6330	449	24.35	5.00	78	72	nt	78
Hoover 7010PH Prestige	749	16.66	na	77	79	nt	71
Rowenta Silence Force Extreme RO822183	550	11.00	na	77	71	nt	78
• **Vax** Air VAU1200	549	16.90	na	77	70	60	72
Wertheim Power Clean W4000	799	23.00	4.25	77	72	nt	74
Bosch XXL-Hose BSGL32XLAU/03	329	23.40	4.00	76	59	nt	85
Sebo Airbelt K1 Pet	740	20.80	4.13	76	57	nt	84
Dyson DC50 Multi Floor	749	10.10	na	75	67	nt	74
• **Shark** Rotator Professional Lift-Away NV500NZ	600	12.80	na	75	82	65	60
Wertheim Dog and Cat W2000	399	17.80	4.24	75	65	nt	80
• **Electrolux** Ultra Silencer Green ZUSG4061	399	13.20	4.25	74	72	61	85
• **Volta** Powerglide Pet Lover U3282AVZ	189	18.90	na	73	75	53	56
• **Dyson** DC25 Origin	699	16.20	na	72	71	59	64
• **Samsung** Cyclone Force Multi SC20F70HC	749	24.10	na	71	55	45	82
• **Bissell** Lift-Off Pet 2177F	299	18.10	na	69	66	44	58
• **Piranha** Striker VU32W-09P	89	22.40	na	68	63	33	54

USING THE TABLE **Price** Recommended retail, as of April 2014. **Annual running costs** are based on one hour's use per week at 26c/kWh. and edges (15%) and pet hair removal (15%). All models scored 100% in the scratch test. **Noise** For comparison, a typical conversation is carried

81% Miele Compact Cat & Dog S6320 (Jun 12) $499
80% Electrolux Ultra Captic ZUC4103DEL (Nov 13) $899
80% Electrolux Ultra Silencer Animal Care ZUS4065PET (Apr 14) $449
80% Miele S2111 (Aug 11) $299
80% Vax Zen 2 Pet VCZP1600 (Jun 12) $379

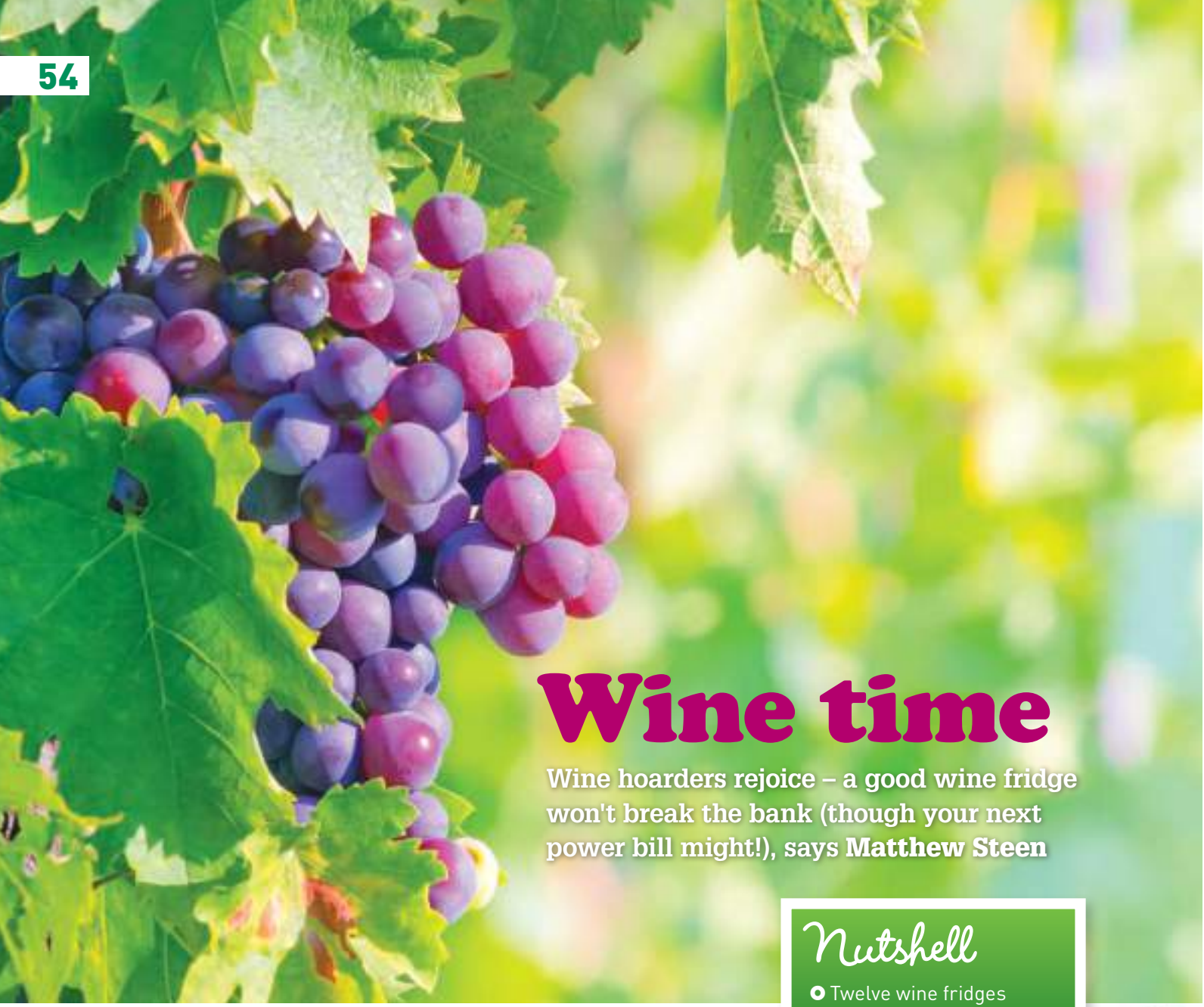
(Month and year in brackets refers to issue of *CHOICE* in which vac was first profiled) ■

IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK



			FEATURES						SPECIFICATIONS							
Cleaning corners and edges score (%)	Pet hair removal score (%)	Noise (dB)	Carpet-hard floor head / power head / turbo brush / hard floor tool	Crevice / upholstery tool / dusting brush	On-board storage	Variable suction control	Variable power	HEPA filter	Type	Dust collector	Power measured (W)	Dust collector volume (L)	Reach from power point (m)	Weight (kg)	Country of manufacture	Contact
80	100	71	✓/✓/–/✓	✓/✓/✓	✓		✓	✓	Barrel	Bag	1600	1.9	9.6	9.8	Germany	sebo.com.au
85	100	70	✓/–/–/–	✓/✓/✓	✓	✓	✓		Barrel	Bag	1770	2.9	9.8	6.2	Germany	miele.com.au
80	100	73	✓/–/✓/–	✓/✓/✓	✓	✓	✓		Barrel	Bag	1780	3.0	11.0	7.5	Germany	miele.com.au
85	100	70	✓/–/–/–	✓/✓/✓	✓	✓	✓		Barrel	Bag	1970	3.0	11.0	7.2	Germany	miele.com.au
85	100	69	✓/–/✓/✓	✓/✓/✓	✓		✓	✓	Barrel	Bag	1330	3.0	11.0	7.6	Germany	miele.com.au
79	100	68	✓/–/✓/–	✓/✓/✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Barrel	Bag	1670	2.7	13.5	9.6	Denmark	nilfiskelite.net.au
78	100	64	✓/✓/–/–	✓/✓/✓	✓(2)		✓	✓	Barrel	Bag	1260	2.6	12.5	9.4	Slovenia	godfreys.com.au
75	100	74	–/✓/–/✓	✓/✓/–	✓		✓	✓	Upright	Bag	1000	3.0	11.0	7.4	Germany	sebo.com.au
79	100	73	✓/–/✓/–	✓/✓/✓	✓(1)		✓	✓	Barrel	Bag	2000	1.5	15.0	7.0	Germany	boschappliances.com.au
85	100	70	✓/–/✓/–	✓/✓/✓	✓	✓	✓		Barrel	Bag	1750	2.4	9.6	6.5	Germany	miele.com.au
80	100	70	–/✓/–/✓	✓/✓/✓	✓		✓	✓	Barrel	Bin	1270	1.2	10.0	9.9	Hungary	electrolux.com.au
71	100	57	✓/–/✓(mini)/✓	✓/✓/✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Barrel	Bag	1300	2.1	12.0	7.9	Hungary	electrolux.com.au
82	90	70	✓/–/–/–	✓/✓/✓	✓	✓	✓		Barrel	Bag	1460	2.8	8.4	5.8	Germany	miele.com.au
80	100	70	✓/–/✓/–	✓/✓/✓	✓	✓		✓	Barrel	Bin	1460	2.2	11.3	8.1	China	vax.com.au
75	90	57	✓/–/–/✓	✓/✓/✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Barrel	Bag	1290	2.4	12.0	7.7	Hungary	electrolux.com.au
85	90	68	✓/–/–/✓	✓/✓/✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Barrel	Bag	1800	2.8	9.6	6.2	Germany	miele.com.au
62	100	71	–/✓/✓/✓	✓/✓/✓				✓	Barrel	Bin	1230	1.1	10.0	8.7	China	hooverfloorcare.com.au
76	90	59	✓/–/✓(mini)/✓	✓/✓/✓	✓	✓		✓	Barrel	Bin	810	1.9	11.3	9.0	France	rowenta.com.au
80	100	75	–/✓/–/–	✓/✓/✓	✓			✓	Upright	Bin	1250	1.0	7.0	5.3	China	vax.com.au
70	100	74	✓/✓/–/–	✓/✓/✓	✓		✓	✓	Barrel	Bag	1700	3.4	11.0	11.6	China	godfreys.com.au
79	100	73	✓/–/–/✓	✓/✓/✓	✓(2)		✓	✓	Barrel	Bag	1730	2.2	13.5	5.7	Germany	boschappliances.com.au
84	100	70	✓/–/✓/–	✓/✓/✓	✓		✓	✓	Barrel	Bag	1540	1.9	8.8	7.3	Germany	sebo.com.au
71	100	75	–/✓/–/✓	✓/✓/✓	✓			✓	Upright	Bin	750	0.6	8.0	5.4	Malaysia	dyson.com.au
60	100	71	✓/✓/✓/–	✓/✓/✓	✓			✓	Upright	Bin	950	2.0	9.5	7.9	China	1800 770 770
65	100	71	✓/–/✓/✓	✓/✓/✓	✓(1)	✓	✓	✓	Barrel	Bag	1320	2.1	9.3	7.0	China	godfreys.com.au
60	70	54	✓/–/–/✓	✓/✓/✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Barrel	Bag	980	2.1	12.0	7.6	Hungary	electrolux.com.au
75	100	76	–/✓/✓/–	✓/–/✓	✓			✓	Upright	Bin	1400	1.5	9.6	8.6	China	electrolux.com.au
60	100	77	✓/✓/–/–	✓/✓/✓	✓			✓	Upright	Bin	1200	1.2	8.0	7.3	Malaysia	dyson.com.au
60	100	73	✓/–/✓/✓	✓/–/✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Barrel	Bin	1780	1.0	12.2	9.3	Vietnam	samsung.com.au
70	100	83	–/✓/✓/✓	–/✓/✓	✓(1)	✓			Upright	Bin	1340	1.2	9.4	8.0	China	bissell.com.au
75	100	80	–/✓/–/–	✓/–/✓	✓				Upright	Bin	1660	1.8	7.3	7.1	China	hegroup.com.au

All models in the table have a dust bag full indicator or a clear bin. Only the Sauber has a blower facility. **Scores** The overall score is made up of dirt removal from carpet (40%), ease of use (30%), cleaning corners out at about 60dB, while city traffic is measured at around 80dB. **Features** See What to Look For, page 47. **TABLE NOTES** • Newly tested. **(1)** One tool only. **(2)** Two tools only. **na** Not applicable. **nt** Not tested.



Wine time

Wine hoarders rejoice – a good wine fridge won't break the bank (though your next power bill might!), says Matthew Steen

Nutshell

- Twelve wine fridges tested, from under-bench models to full-sized.
- Some use an incredibly high amount of energy for what they do.

Although a tiny part of the appliance market, wine fridges (known by a variety of other names including wine coolers, conditioners and cellars) have some vocal advocates.

Whether you're looking for a top-of-the-range model that will keep your most valuable wines for a number of years at the most stable temperatures, or a less expensive version that will chill your bottles for a year or so until quaffing time, we've chosen a range of brands and models to review so you can find the right wine fridge for you.

Enormous energy

Our last test of wine fridges back in 2008 uncovered very high running costs, and not much has changed since then. The DeLonghi DEWC54S, which claims to store 54 bottles of wine, has similar energy use to, if not more than, a large-sized fridge (451-525L). This is despite the fact that a normal fridge has to keep a tighter temperature range for food safety, while the wine fridges only have to cope with a range of 8-16C, depending on their use.

We're disappointed manufacturers refuse to address this, but not surprised given their reticence when it comes to energy compliance reforms – it mirrors what we saw with TV energy use a few years ago. We don't expect wine fridges' extravagant energy usage to change much until they're covered under the mandatory Australian Standard, as will be the case when the next version is released. Until then, be aware that your wine fridge may be an energy hog (see table, page 56).

Do you really need a wine fridge?

Wine changes when it's exposed to fluctuating temperatures, light or vibration. Sometimes it accelerates the tannins and acidity; sometimes the expansion of the glass from temperature sucks in oxygen through the cork when it cools down, changing the taste or simply heating the wine too much. Wine fridges are designed to mitigate the taste change happening too quickly and make that Barossa Valley shiraz taste just as good, if not better, as it did when you bought it from the winery.

Wine storage all depends on your wine consumption. If you're the type of person who buys and drinks it on a weekly basis, then long-term storage isn't going to be an issue for you. But if you want to keep hold of your wines for a year or longer, or condition them to a drinking temperature, a good wine storage device could be perfect for you.

It also depends on the cost of the wines you're buying. If you're spending thousands of dollars on the stuff each year, you might consider a wine fridge to protect your investment. If you spend tens of thousands, you might want to invest in a more expensive professional solution (see page 56).

WHAT TO BUY

We recommend wine fridges that score at least 90% for overall performance.

94%
Liebherr WKb 1712 Barrique

Good points
- Excellent overall temperature performance
- Excellent response to seasonal change
- Excellent for fluctuations
- Very good for uniformity
- Has a door alarm

Bad points
- None to mention

91%
Liebherr WKEes 553

Good points
- Excellent overall temperature performance
- Excellent response to seasonal change
- Excellent for fluctuations
- Relatively quiet
- Low vibration
- Has a door alarm

Bad points
- Uses a lot of energy per bottle

About the rest

Most of the other wine fridges are OK, good or very good overall, with only two we don't recommend at all. The **Palsonic** has poor ambient and uniformity scores and the **Heller** has poor uniformity and overall scores and a very poor ambient score. The excellent score for fluctuation on the Heller is because it kept its compressor on the whole time this test was being conducted. Both the Heller and Palsonic also have higher vibration measurements than the other fridges. Both are poor overall.

Heller of a time

We had to replace the first sample of the Heller wine fridge because it was constantly heating the top of the fridge to a temperature of 55° C – making the top bottle storage section of the fridge unusable. The second sample didn't display this issue, but we don't recommend this fridge anyway due to a number of low performance scores.

What to look for

Location Where will you keep your wine fridge? If it's close to a living area, noise will be a key consideration. If it's to be in your kitchen, you'll want to install it away from extreme temperatures, like heat radiating from the oven. If possible, install it away from any area that's subject to natural temperature swings, such as garages, lofts, or the laundry (if you have an electric-vented dryer that vents into the area). Just like a fridge, make sure there is plenty of room around the sides, rear and top of the installed wine fridge to enable good air circulation. And try to keep it away from direct light.

Doors All the wine fridges tested have glass doors, so you can look into your wine fridge and see what you want before opening the door and letting the temperature change. Some also have solid doors, which may help with insulation and the amount of UV to which your wine is exposed; otherwise you can check that your glass door has a UV coating. Wine bottles are typically coloured to provide some marginal protection from direct light, and any additional protection helps to keep the wine from ageing or degrading too quickly.

Bottle capacity Are you a wine hoarder? Do you buy a couple of hundred bottles at a time? Then plan for either a larger model or a number of small models. If you need an under-bench model, consider the space you'll need and buy more than one if you want to keep a lot of wine. If you go through a lot of champagne, you may want to check if the wine fridge can accommodate these typically wider bottles. If you tend to buy a small amount of wine at a time, one of the smaller models should suit you well.

Charcoal filter Some wine fridges have filters that remove smells from the air within, so it doesn't seep into the cork and into the wine.

	COSTS				PERFORMANCE							FEATURES & SPECIFICATIONS			
	Price ($)	10-year running costs ($)	Bottle capacity claim	Running cost per bottle/yr ($)	Overall score (%)	Ambient score (%)	Fluctuation score (%)	Uniformity score (%)	Measured energy use (kWh / year)	Noise level (dB)	Vibration (mm / sec²)	Child lock on controls	Charcoal filter	Control type (Digital / Analog)	Shelving
Liebherr WKb 1712 Barrique	1499	900	60	1.50	94	100	90	85	346	34	180		✓	D	Wooden, pull-out
Liebherr WKEes 553	2920	488	18	2.71	91	100	90	70	188	23	25		✓	D	Wooden, pull-out
Grand Cru GC40	599	672	40	1.68	84	92	85	60	258	33	48	✓		D	Wooden, pull-out
Vintec V110SGeS3	2650	948	121	0.78	78	86	70	70	365	40	100			D	Wooden, pull-out
Vintec V30SGeS3	700	736	32	2.30	76	84	80	50	283	34	85			D	Wooden, pull-out
DeLonghi DEWC166S	2499	1487	166	0.90	73	68	90	60	572	41	84	✓	✓	D	Wooden, roll-out
Haier JC110GD	587	648	36	1.80	72	72	85	50	249	35	53			D	Wooden, pull-out
Haier JC160GD	977	948	51	1.86	69	66	85	50	365	33	75			D	Wooden, pull-out
EuroCave V-PURE-M	4790	1174	168	0.70	63	72	50	60	452	27	22		✓	D	Wooden, 3 roll-out, 2 bulk
DeLonghi DEWC54S	1399	1453	54	2.69	59	90	20	40	559	39	60	✓	✓	D	Wooden, roll-out
Palsonic PAL42BWF	235	1275	42	3.03	41	30	70	25	490	29	250			D	Metal, pull-out
Heller WCH40	279	1452	40	3.63	34	0	90	35	559	30	290			A	Metal, pull-out

USING THE TABLE Price Recommended retail, as of July 2014. **Cost per bottle** Based on a fully stocked fridge. **Scores** The overall score consists of ambient temperature (50%), fluctuation (30%) and uniformity 1m up and 1m away from the fridge during normal running. Fridges can sound noticeably louder as the compressor starts. **Vibration** While not definitively established, there has been one study completed and much the manufacturers claim to be able to fit into the fridge. **10-year running costs** are calculated at a rate of 26c/kWh. A 10-year period gives a useful indication of the long-term differences between high and low energy

Shelving The less expensive models in our testing tend to have metal shelving, which makes it harder to pull out your wines and can scratch bottles or labels. The more expensive wine fridges have wooden shelving with good sliding mechanisms, which means less vibration and better ease of use, but it's thicker than metal shelving, which means less wine storage space. Check out the shelves before buying, as some have wooden shelving that has no sliding mechanism.

Single-shelf or bulk storage? Some wine fridges provide bulk storage of wine bottles where they stack on top of each other. This means you can fit more in, but it also means bottles are lying on top of each other and so are harder to get to – and there is potential for breakage or scratching the label of that special bottle. Single-shelf storage means more shelving, which reduces wine storage space but may also keep wine safer. Most shelving is interleaved, which is where wine can be stored both forwards and backwards, using space more efficiently.

Locks Some wine fridges have a lock to protect your wines from theft.

Humidity control Some wine fridges have a purported humidity control, which consists of a small container in which you occasionally place water. This gives the fridge humidity sensor the capacity to evaporate the water and keep the humidity at a certain level (70% is generally considered good relative humidity) that maintains cork moisture. This is not particularly relevant for screw tops, but can be good for wines with the traditional cork. We tested a selection of wine fridges for this, and found all manage to keep humidity within five per cent.

Multi-zone If you're keeping different types of wine to store at different temperatures, you might want to consider buying a wine fridge that has multi-zone, or the capacity to have different temperatures in different areas of the fridge. That way you can store, for example, white for drinking at a low temperature in the bottom, and red for storage at a higher temperature at the top.

Low vibration Like fridges, all the tested compressor-type wine cabinets vibrate, particularly when the compressor runs. Whether vibration "agitates" and affects the quality of wine is contentious. A single study suggests a higher vibration measurement of 20Gal, or 200mm/s², leads to an accelerated change in organic acids, tannins and refractive index. Some anecdotal information also suggests that increased vibration during cellaring is probably detrimental to some extent.

Stacking type	Multiple temperature settings	Rollers	Lock	Humidity control	Dimensions (cm, H x W x D)	Built-in or freestanding	Door mount	Contact
Interleaved bulk	✓		✓	✓	85 x 66 x 67	FS	R/L	andico.com.au
Interleaved single shelves	✓			✓	45 x 56 x 53	BI	R/L	andico.com.au
Interleaved single shelves	✓		✓		85 x 50 x 62	FS	Rev	cleverhomeproducts.com.au
Interleaved single shelves	✓		✓	✓	139 x 60 x 68	Both	Rev	vintec.com.au
Interleaved bulk	✓		✓	✓	83 x 50 x 62	FS	Rev	vintec.com.au
Interleaved single shelves	✓		✓	✓	181 x 60 x 72	FS	Rev	delonghi.com.au
Single shelves	✓				98 x 51 x 58	FS	R	haier.com.au
Single shelves	✓				129 x 51 x 57	FS	R	haier.com.au
Bulk and interleaved single shelves	✓		✓	✓	149 x 68 x 69	FS	R/L	eurocave.com.au
Interleaved single shelves	✓		✓	✓	86 x 60 x 62	FS	Rev	delonghi.com.au
Interleaved single shelves	✓				85 x 50 x 54	FS	Rev	palsonic.com.au
Interleaved single shelves	✓				84 x 49 x 56	FS	Rev	gafcontrol.com.au

(20%). **Features** See What to Look For, above. **Energy use (kWh/year)** is based on the fridge's energy consumption. **Noise level** These are comparative measurements taken anecdotal evidence about the affect of vibration on wine. According to the study, vibrations under 200mm/s² are acceptable. **Claimed bottle capacity** This is how many bottles use. **TABLE NOTES R** Right only. **R/L** Right/left. **Rev** Reversible.

HOW WE TEST

There is no Australian standard for testing wine fridges, so we've devised a variation of our fridge testing method, based on wine storage ideals of maintaining a temperature of 14°C and using a loaded fridge in all scored tests.

- **Ambient** – We check the temperature operation range for the wine fridge's ability to operate in external conditions ranging from 10-40°C. (50%)
- **Fluctuations** – We measure temperature fluctuations to see if the cabinets can maintain steady temperatures over the short term as the cooling system cycles. (30%)
- **Uniformity** – Are compartment temperatures generally uniform, without warmer or colder areas? (20%)
- We test a number of wine fridges for humidity control
- We measure energy consumption to see how your running costs will rack up over 10 years.

We measure the vibration of the operating fridge, which is said to have an effect on the wines stored. We also measure noise, for those who will be installing their wine fridge in or close to their living area.

Alternatives to wine fridges

You don't need a wine fridge if you're planning on drinking your wine within a few months. Provided you have space you can store wine on a regular shelf or elsewhere, keeping a few things in mind:

- **Keep your wine out of the light**, as UV can affect it. Options include under-stair storage, closets and cupboards.
- **Minimise the storage area's exposure to vibrations** using matting or carpeting.
- **Keep the wine fridge away from extreme temperature fluctuations**, such as those that come from the oven or your regular fridge, both of which put out a fair amount of heat.
- If these options are out of the question, a **well-insulated cooler** (without the ice) can minimise the affect of temperature change and UV light.

If you simply don't have room or don't want to take up space – or, heaven forbid, you just have too much wine to store in your home – there are alternatives, such as off-site storage.

- General storage businesses such as Kennards offer wine carton storage for a fee; depending on the number of cartons, fees can start from $15 a month.
- Speciality wine storage companies offer a similar service, though at a higher price due to their specialisation.

Where's Miele?

At the time of testing, Miele was turning over its stock of wine fridges so we weren't able to include any of their most recent releases. ■

Same same, but different

While mobile phones are all starting to look similar, there are still significant differences, as **Denis Gallagher** discovers

Josh and Ben from *Farming Ahead* go in search of a phone signal

When we carried out our first CHOICE mobile reception test back in 2008 there were a range of different mobiles, from clamshell flip phones to QWERTY keyboard models, as well as the first Apple iPhone 3G. Since then, the iPhone has completely changed the mobile phone industry, and it seems that the only significant difference between smartphones is the logo and screen size. But reception performance, both for voice calls and now for data as well, remains a critical aspect in finding the best phone for your lifestyle.

4G performance

Before the arrival of fast 4G networks, phone reception for voice calls was the most important aspect to consider in any mobile, and still is for many users. However, many people are now making fewer voice calls and spending more time online. They want the best possible online experience, and that means using a 4G network.

Our 4G performance test was carried out close to a 4G tower, with multiple runs for each phone. Data throughput results were collected for both downloading (browsing the web and watching video) and uploading (posting a video or carrying out collaborative work on documents).

Nutshell

- 15 mobile phones tested, priced from $78 to $995.
- 4G performance is great when you can get it, but it's not the only thing to consider.

3G still the key

If you mainly use your smartphone for online work, social media and collaborative work on documents, or if you watch lots of video, you could be forgiven for thinking the reception score in this test is not as important as the 4G performance score. Well, think again.

While 4G is great, it's not widespread enough to be your main network access option. So consider the 4G performance as a nice-to-have and the reception performance as the must-have.

RECEPTION TESTING IN THE MIDDLE OF NOWHERE

Reception testing on the 850MHz 3G band was conducted in a remote NSW location, chosen for its flat topography surrounding a NextG phone tower and lack of interference from any other towers. No other network was available in this area.

The testers from *Farming Ahead* magazine travelled away from the tower at set distance increments (using GPS) and placing calls with the various handsets. At the limit of reception, some back-tracking was necessary to pinpoint the exact point at which a particular handset fails. All the phones with a Blue Tick classification performed well in this test, but we also achieved some very impressive results from models without a Blue Tick.

IMAGE: THINKSTOCK

WHAT TO BUY

RUGGED/TRADIE CHAMPION

84%
Aspera R5

82%
Telstra Dave (ZTE T83)

Both the **Telstra Dave** and **Aspera** are encased in a ruggedised cover, making them ideal for tradies and anyone else who treats their smartphone a bit carelessly. The IP67 water resistance rating means they can handle submersion in up to one metre of water for up to 30 minutes, with rubber O-ring seals around the various ports.

The Aspera is noticeably heavier and larger than the Dave, but both deliver similar user experiences on the Android platform for web browsing, SMS and emailing, with good sound quality for phone calls.

Aerial connections (also known as patch antennas) are extremely useful when driving in remote areas, and the Dave is the only phone in this test with support for an antenna. The Dave also offers 4G support, although we found its performance to be only OK compared to the other phones tested with 4G support.

The Aspera R5 is a dual SIM mobile, which means it can accommodate two mobile numbers and operate on two different networks. Each SIM can be turned on or off as required – see *CHOICE*, Jul 14 for more.

One limitation with both these phones is that their support for the 850MHz and 2100MHz bands only on a 3G network, so they won't operate on the 900MHz band used by Optus.

APPLE OPTION

83%
Apple iPhone 5S

The **Apple** is a very good smartphone, with excellent reception performance and good call sound quality for voice calls. It remains the best option if you want to choose from the widest range of apps, music and video, using its iTunes and App store environments.

The screen size of the iPhone 5S is relatively small by current standards, with most of the latest phones sporting a display larger than four inches. New iPhones with 4.7- and 5.5-inch displays are rumoured to be out later this year – it seems Apple can no longer ignore the call for bigger screens.

ABOUT THE REST

The Windows Phone 8 offerings include the **Nokia Lumia 1020,** with its impressive 41MP digital camera and excellent reception performance, and the **Nokia Lumia 1320,** with the largest screen tested. While their 4G performance is not great, they still deliver very good performance for the price. If you want an entry-level Windows phone, you may want to consider the **Nokia**

MULTIMEDIA BIG SCREEN OPTIONS

83%
HTC One M8

81%
Samsung Galaxy S5

80%
Sony Xperia Z2

The big thing in smartphones at the moment – the screen – is getting bigger. The **Sony**, **HTC** and **Samsung Galaxy S5** smartphones are powerful, expensive and deliver a large display. All these phones use the latest Android Kit Kat OS, have five-inch displays and include the latest and greatest processors.

The Sony and Samsung models can capture 4K video, while the HTC produces full HD video. All three provide lots of camera controls and interesting image editing effects; the HTC may struggle when using the digital zoom or creating high resolution colour prints as it only has a 5MP main camera, compared to 16MP on the Samsung and a massive 20.7MP on the Sony.

Waterproofing has also been a big thing in 2014, with many manufacturers claiming you can now stop freaking out when your phone tumbles out of your pocket and into the loo. The Samsung claims an IP67 rating (like the Aspera and Telstra Dave), while the Sony scores an IP55/58 rating, which means it can be submerged in up to 1.5 metres of fresh water for up to 30 minutes.

While the NextG reception performance for the Sony is good, it doesn't perform as well as the HTC or Samsung models. For 4G performance, however, the Sony is excellent – it achieved download speeds above 50Mbps on multiple occasions during our test, compared to the Samsung topping out at 43Mbps and the HTC struggling to get to 39Mbps. If phone reception is still a top priority for you, then the HTC or Samsung will serve you well. But if you're an internet junkie, live near a 4G tower and can forget its comparatively poorer phone reception, the Sony phone could well be the one for you.

(What to Buy profiles continue overleaf)

IMAGES: THINKSTOCK

Lumia 630, although you won't get 4G performance. The **Nokia 208** is a basic talk and text offering with very good reception for under $80.

The **Nexus 5** is Google's flagship smartphone and offers very good value for money, as it showcases most of the potential features on offer in the latest Android OS. While it's let down slightly by poorer reception performance than the other phones tested, it would still be a great option for those wanting to use an Android device as it was meant to be used.

The **Motorola Moto X** and **Moto G** mark a welcome return for a once-mighty mobile phone company, with the Moto X one of the better-value 4G offerings tested. However, the lack of storage expansion – with just 16GB of onboard memory – may be an issue for some. The Moto G is also a great-value option if you don't need 4G, and the dual SIM feature should appeal to anyone wanting to keep their work and home lives separate.

		PERFORMANCE												FEATURES								
	Price ($)	Overall score (%)	Reception (%)	Call sound quality (%)	Web (%)	4G performance (%)	Ergonomics (%)	Daily use (%)	SMS (%)	Email (%)	Music player (%)	Internal memory (GB)	Memory card slot	USB connection type	Can be used as a mass storage device	Telstra Blue Tick	External antenna connector	Bluetooth A2DP	Bluetooth type	aGPS	Wi-Fi 802.11	4G	UMTS Bands 850/900/1900/2100 MHz
Aspera R5	399	84	92	73	83	na	82	80	85	90	70	1	MicroSD	Micro	✓			✓	4	✓	✓		✓/–/–/✓
Apple iPhone 5s	995	83	90	73	83	78	74	77	90	90	80	64		Lightning				✓	4	✓	✓	✓	✓/✓/✓/✓
HTC One M8	840	83	84	78	87	84	78	80	85	90	90	16	MicroSD	Micro	✓			✓	4	✓	✓	✓	✓/✓/✓/✓
Motorola Moto X	438	82	85	75	87	81	78	80	85	90	80	16		Micro	✓			✓	4	✓	✓	✓	✓/✓/✓/✓
Telstra Dave	380	82	93	73	83	61	80	80	85	90	80	4	MicroSD	Micro	✓	✓	✓	✓	3	✓	✓	✓	✓/–/–/✓
Samsung Galaxy S5	899	81	84	74	87	75	78	80	85	90	80	16	MicroSD	Micro	✓	✓		✓	4	✓	✓	✓	✓/✓/✓/✓
Samsung Galaxy Young	99	81	84	75	80	na	78	80	85	90	80	4	MicroSD	Micro	✓	✓		✓	3	✓	✓		✓/–/–/✓
Motorola Moto G	238	80	82	69	87	na	78	80	85	90	80	8	MicroSD	Micro	✓			✓	4	✓	✓		✓/✓/✓/✓
Sony Xperia Z2	759	80	75	73	87	96	78	80	85	90	90	16	MicroSD	Micro	✓	✓		✓	4	✓	✓	✓	✓/✓/✓/✓
Telstra EasyCall 3	99	80	90	66	na	na	76	81	70	na	na	2.5		Micro		✓				✓			✓/–/–/–
Nokia Lumia 1020	588	79	90	71	87	48	74	73	85	87	80	32		Micro	✓			✓	4	✓	✓	✓	✓/✓/✓/✓
Nokia Lumia 1320	397	79	84	73	90	65	74	73	85	87	80	8	MicroSD	Micro	✓			✓	4	✓	✓	✓	✓/✓/–/✓
Google Nexus 5	420	78	74	72	87	85	78	80	85	90	80	32		Micro	✓			✓	4	✓	✓	✓	✓/✓/✓/✓
Nokia 208	78	77	82	73	na	na	64	79	80	87	60	(A)	MicroSD	Micro	✓	✓		✓	3				✓/–/–/✓
Nokia Lumia 630	249	75	72	68	87	na	74	73	85	87	80	8	MicroSD	Micro	✓			✓	4	✓	✓		✓/✓/✓/✓

USING THE TABLE **Prices** Recommended retail, as of Jul 14. **Scores** The overall score is made up of reception (35%), call sound quality (20%), web browser (10%), 4G performance (10%, where applicable), daily use

WHAT TO BUY (cont'd)

BEST-VALUE SMARTPHONE

81%
Samsung Galaxy Young

It doesn't support 4G networks, it doesn't have the fastest processor and it has the smallest display of the smartphones tested. But the **Samsung Galaxy Young** does run the latest version of Android, and its reception performance is very good. Its memory can be expanded with microSD cards, and it also includes Navigon car GPS navigation and a 3MP camera. But best of all, you should be able to find it for under $100, making it a good entry-level smartphone option.

BEST 'NANNA PHONE'

80%
Telstra Easy Call 3

The **Telstra Easy Call 3** is for anyone who's a bit less dextrous and/or tech-savvy than the average smartphone user. It has big buttons, there's a text-to-speech feature that can read out an SMS, and T-coil support helps those with a hearing aid. A switch at the back of the phone activates a programmed number, which also sends an alert SMS to up to four numbers, and the text size on the small-but-bright screen is huge. Selecting functions and menu items is simple, and there's even a real torch to help you find your keys in the dark. A camera of some sort would have been handy, and it can't be used as a music player, but it is rated as a Blue Tick phone and our testing confirms its excellent reception performance.

SPECIFICATIONS

Dual SIM	SIM card size	Max. HSDPA speed (Mb/s)	Screen size (mm, W x H)	Screen size (inches, diagonally)	Screen resolution (pixels, W x H)	Camera resolution (megapixels)	Maximum video resolution capture (p)	Video calling resolution (mp)	Battery capacity (mAh)	Standby time claimed (days)	Talk time claimed (hrs)	Country of manufacture	Operating system (as tested)	Dimensions (mm, H x W x D)	Weight (grams)	SAR W/Kg**	Contact
✓	Mini	14.4	50 x 89	4.0	854 x 480	8	720	1.3	2800	25	9.5	China	Android 4.2.1	142 x 77 x 20	242	0.31	asperamobile.com
	Nano	42	50 x 88	4.0	1136 x 640	8	1080	1.2	1560	10	10	China	iOS 7.1	125 x 60 x 8	113	1	apple.com.au
	Nano	42	62 x 110	5.0	1920 x 1080	5	1080	ns	2600	20.6	20	China	Android 4.4.2	142 x 71 x 10	158	0.42	htc.com
	Nano	42	57 x 103	4.6	1280 x 720	10	1080	2	2200	24	13	China	Android 4.4.2	129 x 66 x 11	132	0.85	motorola.com.au
	Mini	42	52 x 87	4.0	800 x 400	5	720	0.3	2500	15.5	8	China	Android 4.1.2	130 x 67 x 13	159	1.35	telstra.com
	Micro	42	63 x 112	5.1	1920 x 1080	16	2160	2	2800	16.3	21	Vietnam	Android 4.4.2	142 x 73 x 9	143	0.6	samsung.com.au
	Mini	7.2	47 x 70	3.3	480 x 320	3	320	nf	1350	12.5	6	Vietnam	Android 4.1.2	110 x 60 x 14	118	1.12	samsung.com.au
✓	Micro	21	56 x 99	4.4	1280 x 720	5	720	1.3	2070	14	14	China	Android 4.4.2	130 x 67 x 12	144	0.79	motorola.com.au
	Micro	42	64 x 114	5.1	1920 x 1080	20.7	2160	2.2	3200	31	19	China	Android 4.4.2	147 x 75 x 9	164	0.71	sony.com.au
	Mini		35 x 29	1.8	320 x 240	na	240	na	1100	12.5	4	China	Proprietary	113 x 52 x 15	89	1.54	telstra.com
	Micro	42.2	58 x 97	4.4	1280 x 768	41	1080	0.9	2000	16	19	China	Windows Phone 8.0	131 x 72 x 15	159	0.76	nokia.com.au
	Micro	42.2	75 x 132	6.0	1280 x 720	5	1080	0.3	3400	28	21	China	Windows Phone 8.0	165 x 87 x 10	221	0.46	nokia.com.au
	Micro	42	62 x 109	4.9	1925 x 1080	8	1080	1.3	2300	12.5	17	S Korea	Android 4.4.2	138 x 70 x 9	129	0.49	play.google.com
	Micro	7.2	37 x 50	2.4	320 x 240	1.3	240	nf	1020	33	4.5	China	Nokia Series 40 04.06	114 x 51 x 13	90	1.16	telstra.com
	Micro	21.1	55 x 99	4.4	854 x 480	5	720	nf	1830	25	16.4	China	Windows Phone 8.1	130 x 67 x 10	133	1.52	nokia.com.au

(5%), ergonomic (5%), SMS (5%), email (5%) and music player (5%). **TABLE NOTES (A)** 64MB. **na** Not applicable. **ns** Not supplied. **nf** Not found.

What to look for

4G is a wireless broadband technology that delivers high-speed performance to mobile devices. Unlike the NextG, Vodafone 850MHz or Optus 900MHz Yes G network, it is not designed to improve the reception or provide wider coverage for phone calls. Its primary purpose is to deliver improved performance for online devices.

USB connections of any type let you transfer files to your computer. Most phones tested use a standard mini or micro USB connection and can have the phone appear on the PC as a removable drive. The Apple iPhone 5S uses a proprietary connection.

Memory card allows you to store photos, music and video and transfer them to a PC using a card reader. Most models use a microSD card that can be used as an SD card with an adapter.

Wi-Fi capability allows you to browse the internet using a wireless connection at home or hotspot when you're out.

Stereo Bluetooth (A2DP) allows you to listen to your music without cables via a pair of Bluetooth stereo headphones.

Headphone connection type A 3.5mm jack allows you to use a standard set of headphones to listen to music.

The **specific absorption rate (SAR)** of the phone indicates the energy absorbed per kilogram of body weight when using the phone as claimed by the manufacturer. Evidence on the effects of exposure to electromagnetic fields remains inconclusive, but you may want to choose a model with a lower SAR value if this is of concern to you.

HSDPA (High Speed Downlink Packet Access) is a 3G protocol allowing high data transfer speeds and capacity. Unfortunately, phones rarely, if ever, reach the claimed figures out in the field. So don't expect to get 42Mbps, as it's just not going to happen.

Camera resolution A five-megapixel (MP) resolution is generally the norm with the latest mobile phones, with some approaching dedicated digital camera status at 10 or even 41 megapixels. ■

IMAGE: THINKSTOCK & SHUTTERSTOCK

Expose a Shonky and WIN!

CHOICE's annual Shonky Awards are back!

We're looking to name and shame companies that take advantage of Aussie consumers. Do you know of a product that's been falsely advertised or is just a complete rip-off? Have you experienced shockingly bad service?

EXPOSE them & you could win a brand new iPad Air!*

Share your Shonky at choice.com.au/expose-a-shonky

SHONKYS

**For competition terms and conditions,* see choice.com.au/expose-a-shonky

Not so fast

A stovetop pressure cooker can save you time – but not as much as you might think, says **Martha Psiroukis**

Pressure cookers are known for making hearty meals fast – in theory. But in practice, you're unlikely to get a fully cooked meal from go to whoa in, say, 45 minutes.

All four stovetop models tested are essentially a simple pot with a lid that seals and locks in the steam to build pressure. The internal temperature then becomes higher than the boiling point of water. Once it reaches the appropriate pressure, the heat can be turned down and the pressure is maintained. This increase in pressure reduces the actual cooking time for most foods (although we find it's slower than the standard absorption method for cooking rice).

While the actual cooking time may be drastically reduced, however, you still need to factor in time for searing the meat, for the cooker to build pressure before the cooking begins, and to depressurise at the end of cooking before you can open the lid. For example, cooking lamb shanks in a pressure cooker may take only 40 minutes of actual cooking time. But you'll need to add on about 10 minutes to sear the meat, a further 10 minutes to build pressure, plus a few extra minutes for cool-down – so all up, about 60 minutes.

You still need to factor in time for searing the meat, and for the cooker to build pressure

Times will also greatly depend on your food's temperature. If you're cooking food straight from the fridge – as most people usually do – you'll need to add more time. High-altitude locations will also take longer to cook, as lower atmospheric pressure also means lower pressure in your cooker.

1.5+ hrs

The average amount of time to cook lamb shanks using an oven

1 hr

The average amount of time to cook lamb shanks using a pressure cooker

That said, an hour of pressure cooking is still less time than, for example, the one-and-a-half hours typically required to cook lamb shanks in an oven (or longer if you like to slow cook them), or about eight hours in an electric slow cooker (see *CHOICE*, Jun 14).

You also need to think about the quantity you're making – you can cook a large batch of shanks in the oven for the same period of time, but these cookers can only manage enough for four people. You may also have to get your butcher to cut the shanks to fit your pressure cooker, as we did.

IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK

WHAT TO BUY

86%
Tefal Acticook 6L

Good points

- Very good cooking performance
- Very easy to use
- Very comprehensive instructions with recipes
- LCD screen and timer control on the lid beeps when pressure is reached
- Beeps when cooking is complete
- Steam is released upwards
- Removable digital timer in lid starts counting down when pressure is released
- Handle mechanism is very easy to use and locks lid into place
- Dishwasher safe except gasket and timer
- Side handles don't become dangerously hot, and fold down for easier storage
- 10-year warranty for metal structure and premature deterioration

Bad points

- Some cracks and crevices around lid can be difficult to clean
- Difficult to remove smell from rubber gasket

ABOUT THE REST

The **Fissler** has a floating, traffic light-style pressure valve that's easy to use; it comes with comprehensive instructions and guidelines, and handles that don't get too hot. It's large, but its narrow base allows it to sit in other pots. The lid is fiddly to clean – you'll need to remove handle and pressure valve before putting it in the dishwasher. Steam is released in a split direction across the lid.

The **Silit** comes with comprehensive instructions with guidelines, and handles that don't get too hot. It too has an easy-to-use floating, traffic light-type pressure valve, but the steam is released in a split direction across the lid. There is a black enamel coating inside the pot, so searing is slower than the others with less caramelisation.

The **Hawkins** is an traditional-looking cooker with no bells or whistles. It comes with fairly comprehensive instructions, but its guidelines and recipes are a little dated. Steam is released upwards, which is a good thing. But the cast aluminium body isn't suitable for acidic foods, and it's not as easy to use as the others.

Specifically, it's fiddly to assemble and disassemble, and difficult to pour food from, as the rim curves inward. And there are no controls – the metal pressure valve needs to be removed completely to be depressurised. There's only one pressure setting, and foods become baked onto surfaces and require soaking to be removed. Gradual cool-down/pressure release is recommended (5-15 mins), but can be done quickly by placing the sealed pot in cold water (take care when doing this). The metal parts on the handle can become dangerously hot, and there's no maximum liquid level mark inside the pan.

Refer to *CHOICE*, Jul 14, page 58 for more on the pros and cons of pressure cookers as well as what to look for when buying one

		PERFORMANCE				FEATURES & SPECIFICATIONS		
	Price ($)	Overall score (%)	Cooking performance on low heat – lamb shanks (%)	Cooking performance on high heat – chilli beef (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Type of controls	Control location	Exterior material
Tefal Acticook 6L	470	86	85	90	83	Touch with digital display	Lid	SS
Fissler Vitavit Comfort Pressure Cooker 3F130567	555	78	85	80	71	Dial with traffic light system	Lid	SS
Silit Sicomatic T Plus 6.5L	685	76	85	80	66	Slide control	Lid handle	SS
Hawkins Ekobase	135	66	75	80	47	None	na	CA

USING THE TABLE **Price** This is the recommended retail price as at Jul 14, except the Hawkins, which is the price we paid in Apr 14. **Scores** vent will hiss and will allow steam to escape. **(B)** Two safety valve releases – the pressure and steam escapes from beneath the control module, parts not suitable for the dishwasher: the silicon seal and gasket, control valve and lid handle. **(E)** Bottom pan only. **SS** Stainless steel. **CA** Cast

Stovetop vs. electric pressure cookers

STOVETOP

- Stovetop models without non-stick coatings are better for preparing acidic or sugar-based foods, such as preserves (but avoid cast aluminium models, such as the Hawkins).
- Temperature control on your stovetop is more difficult and will require more trial and error to get right, compared with the automatic electric versions.
- Most have no electronic controls so there's less that can go wrong with them (only the Tefal in this test has a battery-operated electronic timer, which is removable).
- They're heavier to move about and clean – you need to lift the whole unit, unlike electric cookers, where you only need to remove the inner bowl (which is relatively light).
- Steam release is done manually by turning the release valve (use a tea towel to prevent scalding). This is best done in the sink – the steam is released either across the lid or straight up, depending on the model.
- You can also place the sealed pot into a partially filled sink of cold water to speed up the depressurising process.

ELECTRIC

- Many have automatic steam-release functions.
- They have automatic programs for different foods – that is, they have preset times as a guide. They're not foolproof, and some trial and error is needed to get it right, but they can help.
- Many electronic pressure cookers have other functions, such as slow cooking, steaming, searing or deep-fry settings, making them a more versatile appliance.
- Only the inner bowl and lid need to be removed to be cleaned – the exterior can be wiped over, so they're easier to maintain.
- Our testing has found the non-stick coatings on many models' inner bowls are not as robust as they should be.

If all this sounds like too much hard work, consider a slow cooker instead – see *CHOICE*, Jun 14.

IMAGES: THINKSTOCK

Number of pressure settings	Timer	Pressure regulator valve	Pressure indicator	Number of safety features	Dimensions (cm, W x H x D)	Weight (kg)	Hob type suitability	Claimed capacity (L)	Dishwasher safe	Contact
2	✓	✓	✓	2 (B)	38 x 28 x 28	3.2	All	6	✓(D)	tefal.com.au
2		✓	✓	4	42 x 23 x 25	3.2	All	6	✓(D)	fissler.com.au
2		✓	✓	3	43 x 23 x 25	4.2	All	6.5	✓(E)	eurodesignhomewares.com.au
1			✓(A)	2 (C)	26 x 46 x 26	2.9	All except induction	8		kbford.com.au

The overall score is made up of cooking performance (60%, cooking scores equally weighted) and ease of use (40%). **TABLE NOTES (A)** The and the seal allows steam to escape from between the lid and the pan. **(C)** Locking loop and the position of the lid inside the pan. **(D)** Some aluminium. **na** Not applicable.

Safe & sound

Don't let the stories of pressure cookers exploding put you off – multiple safety features have made this a thing of the past. Modern pressure cookers come with safety features such as pressure indicators, double-locking lids, pressure valves, over-pressure safety systems, and steam-release valves. ■

Try this on for size

A four-person tent might sound just right for your family, but try before you buy, says Matthew Steen

Who doesn't enjoy the great outdoors? Well – maybe some. But for those who do, a good tent can mean the difference between fond memories of a successful family camping holiday and a cold, miserable experience for all. Provided your tent stands up well to the winds and waters nature loves to throw at campers, you and your family should have a rewarding trip.

Nutshell

- We test 11 four-person tents, priced between $150 and $700.
- Take your family shopping with you to make sure they all fit into the tent comfortably.

Is a 4-person tent for me?

You won't necessarily fit four people into a four-person tent – at least, not comfortably. Tent capacity is based on the number of sleeping bags that will fit in, rather than storage space for luggage and other camping gear. All the tents tested have sleeping areas of around 2.3-2.4m, at least on one side. If four people sleep in the tent, this will give each of them around 60cm of width lying down, which may not be enough.

Good camping retailers erect samples of their tents in store so you can tell for sure how much room you'll have. Take your family with you when shopping and get them to try to fit inside the tent; this will give you an idea of just how tight the fit is. You may also want a tent with separate rooms for the kids.

WHAT TO BUY

78%
Boab Outdoor 4ENV Geo Dome Tent

Good points

- Excellent headroom in sleeping area
- Solid material almost right around - suitable for cold weather camping
- Front door can be turned into an awning; poles are supplied
- Walls don't slope in too much
- Instructions sewn into the bag
- Pegs are thick and of very good length

Bad points

- Heavy to carry, although it has wheels
- Time-consuming to set up and pull down
- Relatively high noise leakage
- No door between vestibule and sleeping area

IMAGE: THINKSTOCK

	PERFORMANCE			SPECIFICATIONS
	Price ($)	Overall score (%)	Usability score (%)	Ease of assembly score (%)	Frame type
Boab Outdoor 4ENV Geo Dome Tent	249	78	85	60	Geodesic
Kathmandu Retreat 180	700	78	85	60	Crossover
Outdoor Connection Escape 4	180	77	75	80	Crossover
Caribee Starlite 4	141	73	70	80	Crossover
Coleman Instant Lakeside Dome Tent 4 Person	197	71	65	85	Crossover
OZtrail Breezeway 4V Plus	259	71	75	60	Crossover
Roman Tracker 4VD Tent	269	71	75	60	Crossover
Spinifex Longreach Dome Tent	250	70	65	80	Crossover
Black Wolf Tanami 4EV	319	64	65	60	Crossover
Diamantina Discovery 4EV	200	63	60	70	Crossover
Wild Country Getaway II 4EXV Dome Tent	249	63	60	70	Crossover

78%
Kathmandu Retreat 180

Good points
- Very good headroom in sleeping area
- Walls don't slope in too much
- Solid material almost right around makes it suitable for cold weather camping
- Rear door can be turned into an awning; poles are supplied
- Instructions sewn into the bag
- Pegs are thick and of very good length

Bad points
- Heavy to carry
- Time-consuming to set up and pull down
- Most expensive tent tested by far

77%
Outdoor Connection Escape 4

Good points
- Solid material right around makes it suitable for cold weather camping
- Instructions sewn into the bag

Bad points
- Only OK for headroom in sleeping area
- Walls slope in a fair bit, restricting headroom towards the sides and back
- Pegs are quite short and thin

(What to Buy profiles continue overleaf)

Sleeping area dimensions (m, L x W x H)	Vestibule dimensions (m, L x H x W)	Weight (kg)	Number of doors	Number of windows	Internal storage pockets	Hanging hooks / ring	Contact
2.4 x 2.4 x 2.0	1.4 x 2.4 x 1.7	16	3	2	13	7	raysoutdoors.com.au
2.2 x 2.3 x 1.9	2.3 x 2.3 x 1.6	17	5	3	10	12	kathmandu.com.au
2.3 x 2.4 x 1.7	1.2 x 2.4 x 1.5	10	3	2	2	5	outdoorconnection.com.au
2.4 x 2.2 x 1.8	1.2 x 2.2 x 1.5	8	3	2	2	1	caribee.com.au
2.3 x 2.3 x 1.5	1.2 x 2.3 x 1.3	9	2	3	2	4	colemanaustralia.com.au
2.3 x 2.2 x 1.8	1.7 x 2.2 x 1.8	10	5	2	6	5	oztrail.com.au
2.4 x 2.2 x 1.9	1.5 x 2.2 x 1.7	13	3	2	2	10	roman.com.au
2.3 x 2.2 x 1.8	1.2 x 2.2 x 1.7	7	3	2	8	9	anaconda.com.au
2.3 x 2.4 x 1.9	1.7 x 2.4 x 1.5	11	3	2	10	3	blackwolf.com.au
2.3 x 2.3 x 1.8	1.8 x 2.3 x 1.5	10	5	2	4	3	diamantina.net.au
2.4 x 2.4 x 1.8	2.0 x 2.4 x 1.7	10	4	2	4	3	raysoutdoors.com.au

USING THE TABLE
Price RRP, as of June 2014.
Scores The overall score is made up of usability (70%) and ease of assembly (30%).
Features See What to Look For, right, for details.

What to look for
- **Size** Aim for above claimed capacity to avoid a tight fit – if you have four people, look for a six-person tent.
- **Type** If you want a dome tent, we classify your choices as crossover (the frame poles cross over each other), geodesic style (crossover poles and two hoop poles at the sides) and pure dome (two hoops). Geodesics generally have more space and greater stability, but are heavier and a little slower to put up.
- **Height** Make sure the tent is high enough to stand in and that the walls don't slope in too much, limiting your usable space.
- **Instructions** sewn to the tent's carry bag can help prevent them getting lost.
- A **vestibule floor** is handy, and those that peg down are easier to secure than those that use clips or velcro.
- A **large, strong carry bag** is essential, but what appears to be an adequate size in the shop may be too small when you try to fit the tent back in. It never rolls up as compactly as when you first got it!
- **Pegs** should be long (at least 20cm) and thick (around 5mm) and preferably steel. Plastic pegs are good in very sandy soil but break more easily.
- **Ropes** should also be a good length, thickness (a minimum of 3.5-4mm diameter) and easy to adjust.
- **Peg-down points** should be heavy-duty and securely attached.
- **Windows** should be large and easily secured. Zipped windows are best, but there should be wide flaps over the zip to prevent rain leaking in.
- **Vestibule doors** that roll up (not sideways) are handy as they can be pegged out as awnings.
- **Internal pockets** in the inner tent are useful for storing small items.
- **Power cord access** through a small zip in the inner tent wall can be useful if you plan to use power.

WHAT TO BUY (CONT'D)

73%
Caribee Starlite 4

Good points
- Good headroom in sleeping area
- Front door can be turned into an awning and poles are supplied

Bad points
- Solid material right around but it looks and feels very flimsy and see-through
- Pegs are a reasonable length but very thin
- Walls slope in a lot towards sides and back, reducing headroom

71%
Coleman Instant Lakeside Dome Tent 4 Person

Good points
- Easiest/fastest to set up and pull down
- Solid material right around
- Front door can be turned into an awning and poles are supplied

Bad points
- Borderline for headroom in sleeping area
- Walls slope in a lot towards sides and back, reducing headroom
- Pegs are fairly short but quite thick

71%
OZtrail Breezeway 4V Plus

Good points
- Good headroom in sleeping area
- Walls don't slope in too much
- Rear door can be turned into an awning and poles are supplied

Bad points
- Partial-mesh walls may not keep the wind out of the sleeping compartment on a cold day
- Time-consuming to set up and pull down
- The pegs are short and thin

71%
Roman Tracker 4VD Tent

Good points
- Very good headroom in sleeping area
- The walls don't slope in too much
- Front door can be turned into an awning and poles are supplied
- Instructions are sewn into the bag

Bad points
- The partial mesh walls may not keep the wind out on a cold day
- Takes a while to set up and pull down
- The pegs are fairly short and thin
- Heavy to carry

70%
Spinifex Longreach Dome Tent

Good points
- Good headroom in sleeping area
- Front door can be turned into an awning, but poles are not supplied

Bad points
- Walls slope in a fair bit, restricting headroom towards the sides and back
- Partial mesh walls may not keep the wind out on a cold day
- The pegs are short and thin

ABOUT THE REST

The **Black Wolf** tent is not as easy to assemble as the recommended tents, and combined with its usability score simply didn't make the cut. While both the **Diamantina** and **Wild Country** have good ease of assembly scores, their lower usability scores let them down – particularly the construction, which uses a lot of mesh rather than solid material. ■

STAMP OUT THE DAMP

Chris Barnes looks for the best dehumidifiers to defeat indoor dampness

Nutshell

- 16 dehumidifiers tested, including seven newly tested models, with water removal rates ranging from 10L to 25L per day.
- The Ionmax desiccant rotor models are the clear winners in cold conditions.

Damp indoor air is bad news for your furniture, fittings and even your health. Mould and dust mites can thrive in moist conditions. Major dampness may require structural solutions such as under-floor ventilation, but for some homes, a far simpler solution could be a portable dehumidifier.

Dehumidifiers typically use refrigeration technology to condense water from the air, and then reheat it and push the warmer, drier air back into the room. This works best when the air is warm to start with, so it's easier to cool. The process warms the room, though not as much as a dedicated electric heater. In winter, an electric heater and dehumidifier can work well together. An air conditioner may be a better dehumidifying option in hot, humid climates where a dehumidifier's heating effect could be undesirable.

For tips on removing mould, see *CHOICE*, Aug 12, or log on to **choice.com.au/mould**

Desiccant rotor dehumidifiers, such as the Ionmax models, use a slowly rotating disc or belt of material that absorbs moisture from the air; the damp section then moves through a drying process (typically a heating element) that evaporates the water and collects it in the tank. Because they don't use cooling to extract the moisture, desiccant rotor models are generally more effective in cold climates than refrigerant models, and should be effective in warm climates too.

The colder the room, the slower the rate of water removal (for most models). So we test the units at different temperature/humidity combinations that reflect humid winter climates (between 8°C and 16°C and 65-90% relative humidity).

IMAGE: THINKSTOCK

REDUCING DAMPNESS

Keep rooms ventilated and warm during winter – at least 7°C warmer than outside temperatures. Insulation will help with this. Heavy curtains help keep your home warm and also reduce the number of cool surfaces for water vapour to condense on. Leave windows closed on damp days.

In damp conditions, a reverse-cycle air conditioner is a good heating option as it also dries the air. An electric heater or flued fire (gas or solid fuel) is another option, but avoid using unflued gas heaters as these release moisture into the air.

Fit extractor fans over the cooktop or stove, and in the bathroom (ducted to the outside). Cupboard heaters and ventilation grilles can help dry out problem wardrobes.

Vent clothes dryers to the outside. When hanging clothes to dry, a covered outdoor space is preferable to hanging them indoors. Close doors when cooking, showering or using the dryer, to limit the spread of moist air.

Limit the number and size of pot plants in your home.

Check whether the ground under your house is dry. If it's wet, cover with polythene (if feasible), taping the joints, and ensuring a tight fit around piles. Check that drainage systems are diverting water away.

Fix leaks in the roof or around windows.

For more details, including how we test, go to **choice.com.au/dehumidifiers**

		PERFORMANCE				FEATURES				SPECIFICATIONS								
	Price ($)	Overall score (%)	Water removal score (%)	Energy efficiency score (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Timer	Humidistat	Wheels / castors	Cord storage	Room heating (W)*	Power consumption (W)	Running costs (c/hr)**	Power cost to remove 10L of water ($)*	Weight (kg)	Noise (dBA)	Measured tank capacity (to switch-off, L)	Claimed water removal rate (L/day)***	Fan speeds
Ionmax ION632	495	80	96	62	68	✓				921	689	18	4.91	8.4	60	3.5	10	1
• **Ionmax** ION612	396	73	77	60	80	✓				762	580	15	5.20	6.1	53	1.8	7	2
• **DeLonghi** DDS30 Combi	449	68	62	78	70	✓	✓	✓		400	253	7	2.81	16.2	56	3.7	25	3
Suki WDH-928DBH-20R	545	67	64	76	62		✓	✓		430	295	8	3.16	14.6	58	4.3	20	2
• **Dehum** Dampro 20 DYD-F20A	380	65	55	77	72	✓	✓	✓	✓	343	234	6	2.93	13.2	53	5.9	20	2
• **Rowenta** Intense Dry Control DH4110	480	65	53	83	70	✓	✓	✓		313	172	4	2.23	12.9	45	4.1	16	2
Omega Altise ODE20	399	64	52	73	80	✓	✓	✓		448	271	7	3.56	12.6	58	5.1	20	2
Dry Home DH24	880 (A)	62	56	64	72		✓	✓	✓	550	389	10	4.73	16.4	52	4.1	24	1
Dimplex DHM20	399	58	47	69	67	✓	✓	✓		384	281	7	4.07	13.0	50	3.3	20	2
• **Olimpia Splendid** Aqua Dry 16	495	57	39	80	67		✓	✓	✓	229	145	4	2.55	13.8	41	3.2	16	1
Cli-Mate CLI-DH12	349	56	40	78	63		✓			258	164	4	2.81	9.5	46	2.0	12	2
• **DeLonghi** DES 16EW	329	53	35	69	75		✓	✓		285	206	5	4.04	9.6	55	3.1	16	2
Teco TD12M1	245	51	35	66	70		✓	✓	✓	303	225	6	4.36	14.0	52	3.4	12	1
Omega Altise ODE10	248	49	33	69	60		✓	✓		278	191	5	3.97	10.6	54	3.2	10	1
Dimplex GDDE20	299	47	35	50	73	✓	✓	✓		450	338	9	6.54	13.2	53	2.2	20	2
• **Suki** 12	345	41	19	68	57		✓			126	117	3	4.19	8.9	54	2.3	12	1

WHAT TO BUY

Both Ionmax models have comparatively high energy consumption when running, but their water extraction is so effective that they achieve a high level of extraction in a comparatively short time.

73%
Ionmax ION612

IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK

Good points

- Good water removal
- Very good instructions and controls
- Contains no refrigerant gas
- Very easy to move despite lack of castors

Bad points

- No humidistat
- Comparatively high energy consumption

PREVIOUSLY RECOMMENDED

80% Ionmax ION632 (*CHOICE*, Sep 13) $495

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Humidistat This allows you to set the humidity level for the room. Rotary dial humidistats with no precise markings make it hard to find the actual humidity level.

Low temperature effectiveness Excessive moisture in the air can occur at high and low temperature. Manufacturers might give water removal rates at conditions which make their machines look the best, typically 30°C and 80% relative humidity. Performance is often lower at colder temperatures; if you need to deal with winter condensation, ask for figures at 10°C and 15°C, although they will not always be available.

Mobility Wheels, castors and handles are useful as dehumidifiers can be heavy. Cord storage is handy when moving the unit or packing it away.

Tank Small water-collection tanks make a dehumidifier more compact and easier to carry around. But if the tank is too small, you'll have to empty it several times a day. Models with larger tanks won't need to be emptied as often but can be bulkier. The tank should be easy to remove, and big enough to hold a few litres of water (most can hold at least three litres).

Continuous drain is useful if the dehumidifier will be run for long periods in the same location; all tested models can do this. The Ionmax models, Cli-Mate, DeLonghi DES 16EW and Olimpia Splendid come with an adaptor hose to pour the collected water straight down a drain. For other models you'll need to supply your own hose or buy it as an extra accessory.

Controls and labels should be easy to see, understand and use.

Filter All the tested models have an air filter for trapping dust.

Noise Most dehumidifiers make upward of 50 decibels (dB) of noise – enough to be annoying if you're trying to watch TV, talk or sleep. For comparison, most fridges are about 30-40dB. If you can, get the retailer to turn the unit on so you can hear the noise before you buy.

ABOUT THE REST

Of the other newly tested models, the **DeLonghi DDS30 Combi** has the best water removal (though not as good as the Ionmax units) along with good energy efficiency. The **Dehum** and **Rowenta** also have rate well for energy efficiency, but aren't as good at water removal. The **Olimpia Splendid and DeLonghi DES 16EW** have comparatively poor water removal, while the **Suki 12** is comparatively very poor at water removal. ■

CALL US TODAY
choice SHOPPER
1300 360 655

Contact
ionmax.com.au
ionmax.com.au
delonghi.com.au
sukidehumidifier.com.au
dehum.com.au
rowenta.com.au
omegaaltise.com.au
dryhome.com.au
dimplex.com.au
olimpiasplendid.com.au
sleepsolutions.com.au
delonghi.com.au
teco.com.au
omegaaltise.com.au
dimplex.com.au
moisturecure.com.au

USING THE TABLE
Price Typical retail, as of June 2014. **Scores** The overall score is made up of water removal (50%), energy efficiency (30%) and ease of use (20%). **Noise** For comparison, a typical conversation is carried out at about 60dB, while city traffic is measured at around 80dB. **TABLE NOTES** • Newly tested. All dehumidifiers made in China. All have an air filter and at least one carry handle. * The heat delivered to the room at 12°C and 75% relative humidity. ** Based on electricity cost of 26c/kWh. *** At 30-32°C/80% relative humidity, except the Ionmax models (20°C /60%). **(A)** Also available for hire for $220/month, which is deducted from the price if you buy it.

SAVE TIME AND MONEY ON YOUR NEXT PURCHASE

Check out CHOICE's new buying guides at **choice.com.au/sneakpeek** They're your guide to everything you need to know about:

ELECTRIC HEATERS

choice.com.au/electric-heaters

VACUUM CLEANERS

choice.com.au/vacuum-cleaners

ELECTRIC BLANKETS

choice.com.au/electric-blankets

WASHING MACHINES

choice.com.au/washing-machines

AND MUCH, MUCH MORE...

CHOICE team

Chief Executive Officer Alan Kirkland **Executive Assistant** Alana O'Sullivan
Digital Innovation Thomas Taylor (Director), Sarah Deitz (Digital Product Manager), Eleonor Collins, Lisa McKenzie, Bohdan Dubik, Ashraf Mikhail **Product Content & Testing** Michael Hohl (Director) **Digital Home** Chris Ruggles (Team Leader), Tamas Bari, Ben Bridges, Denis Gallagher, Scott O'Keefe, James Thomson **Household** Chris Barnes (Team Leader), Antonio Bonacruz, Kim Gilmour, Peter Horvath, Fiona Mair, Martha Psiroukis, Matthew Tung **Whitegoods** Matthew Steen (Team Leader), Graham Byrne, Corinna Horrigan, Mohamed Jawahir, Petr Valouch **Facility & Support** John Ashes (Manager), Klaus Neuscheler (Lab Manager), Narelle Cornelius, Sharon Cauduro, Pam Gardiner, Sonja Scodeller, Christine Shaday, Joe Sydney **Content & Delivery** Monica Melki (Head of Content), Ian Morgan (Head, Content Operations), Darrin Baker, Adrian Oosthuizen **Content Delivery** Katherine Hartmann (Team Leader), Jane Bardell, Sam Butler, Siobahn Donohoe, Caitlin Welsh **Design** Ren Matthews (Team Leader), Erin Farrugia, Gene Ross, Phasathorn Woottiarporn, Danny Wynne **News** Kate Browne (Team Leader), Karina Bray, Zoya Sheftalovich **Investigations** Andy Kollmorgen (Team Leader), Jodi Bird, Jemma Castle, Rachel Clemons, Uta Mihm **Technology** Steve Duncombe (Team Leader), Ros Page, Peter Zaluzny **Finance & Commercial** George Perry (Director) **Finance** Vivien Power (Manager), Vivian Jin, Sera Raicama, Darrell Sly, Leonie Sly **Information & Communication Technologies** Steve Macdonald (Manager), Thelma Bracken, Charles Ly **Marketing & Customer Experience** Michelle Rappaport (Director) **Consumer Insights** Kerin Williams (Manager), Isabel Lam, Julia Westwood **Customer Services** Marina Bennett (Manager), Maria Billinis, Sathya De Leeuw, David Hill, Lynda-Maree Morgan, Silvana Ristevska, Piki Vaifale-Muliaga **Marketing** Steve Connolly (Head), Rachel van Zanten **Campaigns & Communications** Matt Levey (Director), Tom Godfrey (Head of Media), Erin Turner (Campaigns Manager), Elissa Freeman (Consumer Policy Manager), Sarah Agar, Madison Cartwright, Meredith Cridland, Kirsten Tidswell **Awards & Partnerships** Linda Magee (Manager) **People & Purpose** Olympia Fourtounis (Head), Lee Boztepe **Marketing statistics** supplied by GfK Marketing Services

Use of CHOICE materials policy

Be on notice If you wish to use any CHOICE ratings, reports, articles, materials, photography, graphics, publications, books, products or equivalent materials including trademarks ("the materials"), in whole or part, you must obtain our written permission before doing so. Failure to seek permission will be dealt with severely and use without written permission is forbidden. You are not permitted to lift material from our website. Requests for permission may be made to CHOICE Consumer Services, 57 Carrington Rd, Marrickville, NSW 2204. Phone (02) 9577 3399; fax (02) 9577 3355; email **ausconsumer@choice.com.au** Our materials are protected in Australia and internationally by the law of copyright, moral rights, trademark, equity, trade practices, fair trading and other laws and principles. We reserve the right to take legal action to prevent any unauthorised use or reproduction of our materials, in whole or part, for any purpose including but not limited to advertising, logos and any commercial purpose use. Please report any breach of our Use of Materials Policy to CHOICE at the above address.

Your privacy We are committed to protecting your privacy and abide by Australia's National Privacy Principles (as amended and revised). We never sell, publish or disseminate mailing lists to third parties. You can find our privacy statement at **choice.com.au/privacy-policy** or contact us at the above address for a copy.

Intellectual property CHOICE™ is a trademark of the Australian Consumers' Association Ltd. All information, artworks, photographs, compilations or equivalent works appearing in our magazines, on our website, in electronic media and/or online is the subject of copyright/trademark or otherwise protected under Australian and international law for our exclusive use. © Australian Consumers' Association Ltd 1960-2014 inclusive. All rights reserved. Only CHOICE Award winners and CHOICE Recommended licensees are permitted to use the CHOICE™ trademark, and use of the CHOICE™ trademark by licensed parties must be approved by CHOICE before publication.

Directors The Australian Consumers' Association is governed by an honorary and independent board elected by financial and voting members. Board directors give their time without remuneration. Directors must be free from conflicts of interest and have clear lines of responsibility.

BOARD Chair Nicole Rich **Directors** Robert Antulov, Allan Asher, Sandra Davey, William Davidson, Frank Muller, Ben Slade, Ian Spight

Company Secretary Linda Magee

The Australian Consumers' Association is a not-for-profit organisation limited by guarantee. ACN 000 281 925 ABN 72 000 281 925. Registered office: 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville, NSW 2204, Australia.

Log on to choice.com.au/choiceextra (see below right) for a full index from 2007 onwards. Bold type indicates a product test, member survey or user trial report. Normal type indicates a CHOICE research report. *Indicates an update, addition or correction.

Index

Accommodation booking sites Sep
Air conditioners
portable **Nov**
reverse-cycle **Oct, May**
Airfares, online May
Anti-wrinkle treatments Apr
Appliance reliability **Apr**
Australian Consumer Law Dec/Jan
AV receivers **Dec/Jan**

Baby craft **Oct**
Bank accounts, children's Aug
Barbecues **Dec/Jan**
Barrel vacuum cleaners **Nov, Apr**
Beard trimmers **Sep**
Beer, craft Feb
Bikes
buying guide Nov
electric **Feb**
lights **May**
Blankets, electric **Jul**
Blenders **May**
Blood pressure monitors **Dec/Jan**
Board (tabletop) games Aug
Botox Apr
BPAY View Oct
Brand loyalty **Apr**
Breadmakers **Nov**
Breakfasts, on-the-go Jun

Cab alternatives & apps Jun
Camcorders **Nov**
Cameras
action **Feb**
fixed-lens **May**
rugged **Oct**
SLR **Dec/Jan**
system **May**
Car
GPS apps **Dec/Jan, Jul**
keys, smart Feb
rental Sep
roof boxes **Jun**
tyres **Dec/Jan, Jun**
used **Oct**
Carbon-free investing May
Ceiling fans **Sep**
CFLs (light bulbs) **Oct***
Charity marketing Aug
Chia seeds Jul
Children's
bank accounts Aug
lunchbox snacks Jun, Aug*
Chocolate (block) **Apr**
CHOICE Shonkys Nov, Dec/Jan*
Christmas
lights **Dec/Jan**
rip-offs Dec/Jan
Cleaning products (chemicals) Oct
Clothing
ethical Feb
geo-blocking May
Cockroach killers **Nov**
Coconut oil Mar
Computers
password managers **May**
tablet **Mar, Apr**
Contacting companies Nov
Cookers
multi- **Jul**
pressure **Jul, Aug***
slow **Jun**
Cooktops, induction **Sep, Mar**
Cordless
drills **Jul**
phones **May**
Corporate sponsorship Apr
Cosmetics geo-blocking Dec/Jan
Credit reporting Apr
Crowdfunding Jun

Dark patterns (websites) Jun
Dehumidifiers **Sep, Aug**
Dental care Sep
Detergents, laundry **Jun**
Diets, online Sep
Digital cameras **Oct, Dec/Jan***
Dishwasher
detergents **Oct**
troubleshooting Jun
Dishwashers **Nov, Mar, Jun**
Dishwashing liquids **Feb**
Doctors' tips Oct
Drills, cordless **Jul**
Duty-free shopping Sep
DVRs **Feb**

Eating out mark-ups May
E-cigarettes Aug
Electric
bikes **Feb**
blankets **Jul**
heaters **May, Jun**
ovens **Apr**
toothbrushes **Jun**
Emergency radios **Jul**
E-readers **Apr**
Espresso machines **Sep, Feb**
Ethical clothing Feb
Exercise machines Aug
Extras (health) insurance Mar

Fans, ceiling **Sep**
Fermented foods Jul
First home saver accounts Feb
"Fit for purpose" goods Dec/Jan
Fitness
gadgets Mar
watches **Mar**
Food allergen labelling Oct
Food & drink
& medicines Jul
breakfasts, on-the-go Jun
chia seeds Jul
chocolate (block) **Apr**
fermented foods Jul
free-range ham & turkey Dec/Jan
frozen yoghurt chains Sep
fruit & vegetables Mar
gluten-free Apr
junk (marketing) Nov
labelling Oct, Nov
takeaway meals Feb
yoghurt May
Foot care Feb
Free-range ham & turkey Dec/Jan
Freezers **Oct**
Fridges **Mar, May**
Frozen
pizza Feb
yoghurt chains Sep
Fruit & vegetables Mar

Garden shredders **Sep**
Garment steamers **Mar**
Gas heaters May
Geo-blocking
clothing May
cosmetics Dec/Jan
Gluten-free foods Apr
GPS, in-car **Dec/Jan**

Hair straighteners **Jul**
Handheld
blenders **May**
mixers **May**
Hard-to-contact companies Nov
Hayfever treatment Sep
Headphones **Jun**
Health
anti-wrinkle treatments Apr
body numbers May
botox Apr
chemicals (cleaning products) Oct
dental care Sep
doctors' tips Oct
exercise machines Aug
extras insurance Mar
foods & medicines Jul
foot care Feb
hayfever treatment Sep
hospital infection rates Sep
insurance Mar, Jun, Jul
measurements May
painkillers Jun
screening Mar
travelling Dec/Jan
Healthy holidays Dec/Jan
Heaters
electric May, Jun
flame-effect May
gas May
Home
& contents insurance Nov, Jul
heating May
loans, risky May
theatre systems **Oct**
warranty insurance Mar
Hospital infection rates Sep
Hyundai Highlander ix35 **Apr**

Induction
cooktops **Sep, Mar**
cookware **Feb**
Insurance
discrimination, mental health Feb
extras Mar
health Jun, Jul
health, extras Mar
home & contents Nov, Jul
home warranty Mar
life Oct, Aug
pet Apr
travel Dec/Jan
Irons, steam Mar

Juicers **Oct**
Junk food marketing Nov

Kettles **Apr**
Kia Rondo **Feb**

Landline phones **May**
Laptops, back to school Feb
Laundry detergents **Jun**
Lawnmowers
battery/electric **Nov**
ride-on **Dec/Jan**
Life insurance Oct, Aug
Light bulbs (CFLs) **Dec/Jan**
Lights, bike **May**
Line trimmers **Sep**
Lunchbox snacks, children's Jun, Aug*

Marketing, junk food Nov
Media hubs **Apr**
Men's shavers **Dec/Jan**
Mental health & insurance Feb
Microwaves **Feb**
Mixers
benchtop **May**
handheld **May**
Mobile phone rights Jul
Mobile phones – see smartphones
Money
credit reporting Apr
first home saver accounts Feb
home loans (risky) May
payday lending Jul
superannuation Apr
Mosquito repellents **Dec/Jan**
Multi-
cookers **Jul**
function power tools **Feb**

Next G phones **Aug**

Online
airfares May
crowdfunding Jun
diets Sep
reviews Nov
spectacles, buying Nov
On-the-go breakfasts Jun
Ovens, electric **Apr**
Overseas volunteering Mar

Painkillers Jun
Paper shredders **Feb**
Password managers **May**
Payday lending Jul
Pet insurance Apr
Phones
cordless landline **May**
mobile (smart) **Sep, Mar, Jul, Aug**
Phoning overseas Oct
Pool cleaners **Nov**
Portable air conditioners **Nov**
Pressure
cleaners **Mar**
cookers Jul, **Aug**
Pricing problems Jul
Printers **May**

Radios, emergency **Jul**
Refrigerators – see Fridges
Reverse-cycle air conditioners **Nov, May**
Reviews, online Nov
Robot vacuum cleaners **Apr**

Screening (health) Mar
Secateurs **Sep**
Sewing machines **Oct**
Shavers, men's **Dec/Jan**
Shonkys, The Nov, Dec/Jan*
Shopping centre layouts Dec/Jan
Shredders, garden **Sep**
Slow cookers **Jun, Aug***
Smart car keys Feb
Smartphones **Sep, Mar, Jul, Aug**
Smash repairers Mar
Sony 4K TV **Dec/Jan**
Soundbars **Oct**
Spectacles, buying online Nov
Steam
mops Feb
stations **Mar**
Stick vacuums Nov
Streamers (media) **Apr**
Superannuation Apr

Tablet computers **Mar, Apr**
Tabletop games Aug
Takeaway meals Feb
Tattoo removal Oct
Taxi alternatives & apps Jun
Telephones – see Phones
Televisions – see TVs
Tents **Oct, Aug**
Toasters **Apr**
Toddler formula & milks Jul
Toothbrushes, electric **Jun**
Travel
accommodation Sep
airfares (online) May
health Dec/Jan
insurance Dec/Jan
review sites Nov
TVs **Sep, Nov, Dec/Jan, Apr, Jul**
Tyres, car **Dec/Jan, Jun**

Universal remotes **Mar**
Upright vacuum cleaners **Nov, Apr**
Used car safety **Oct**
User-generated reviews Nov

Vacuum cleaners
barrel/upright **Nov, Apr, Aug**
buying guide Aug
robot **Apr**
stick **Nov**
Volunteering abroad Mar
Vouchers Aug

Warranties Dec/Jan
Washer/dryers Aug
Washing clothes Sep
Washing machines **Sep, Dec/Jan*, Apr, Jul**
Website tricks Jun
Wine
fridges Aug
mark-ups May
medals Aug

Yoghurt May

Contact us

MEMBER HELPLINE

Contact us for advice on all consumer issues.
Phone 02 9577 3399
Fax 02 9577 3377

SWITCH TO DIGITAL

To change from a print magazine to one for your tablet, call **1800 069 552**, during business hours (AEST) or visit **choice.com.au/signup**

JOIN CHOICE.COM.AU

For just $11.50/qtr extra, *CHOICE* magazine subscribers can also access hundreds of test reports and articles on finance, food, health, computing, cars, and products and services for babies. You'll also find interactive tools to help you choose products. **Call 1800 069 552** to upgrade your subscription.

EMAIL US

ausconsumer@choice.com.au
Send in your questions for our experts to answer or share your consumer experiences – good and bad.

WRITE TO US

CHOICE
57 Carrington Road,
Marrickville, NSW, 2204

USE CHOICE SHOPPER

Call 1300 360 655
All you need is the model name and number of the product you want to buy, the price you want to beat, and your *CHOICE* subscriber number (from the mailing label with the magazine).

USE CHOICE EXTRA

To request back copies of magazine articles, please **call 1800 069 552** and have your subscriber number ready, or visit **choice.com.au/choiceextra**

HARD WORD

Thanks this month go to eagle-eyed members Miranda Herron, Angharad Robinson and Lorraine Tacouni, along with CHOICE staff. If you have any other examples you'd like to share with other CHOICE members, send them with your full name to The Hard Word, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville, NSW 2204. Please don't email us your entries – we need the unmarked originals. Compiled by Siobahn Donohoe

Batty lashes

Does this mascara's gluten-free claim mean you can now safely flutter your lashes in the direction of that coeliac sweetie?

ODD SOCKS

Either these are the funniest-looking rabbits we've ever seen, or someone is trying to pull the wool over our eyes.

WOOLLY THINKING

We found Woolies' wine savings pretty bamboozling.

Without a doubt, a tasty package...

... not having opened it, we're indeed "unable" to "dispute" that these "fashionable" pistachios have an "aftertaste without end". We'll just have to believe the first-person testimony.

ISSN 0009 496X. Print post approved 100000729. Wholly printed in Australia by AIW Printing Pty Ltd, 26–30 Parsons Avenue, Springvale 3171 in 2014 for the publisher, CHOICE, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville 2204.